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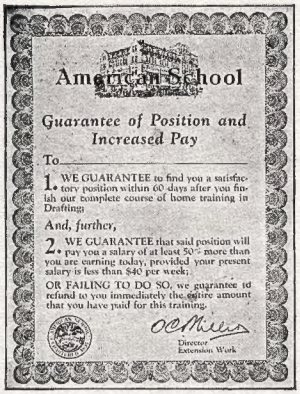
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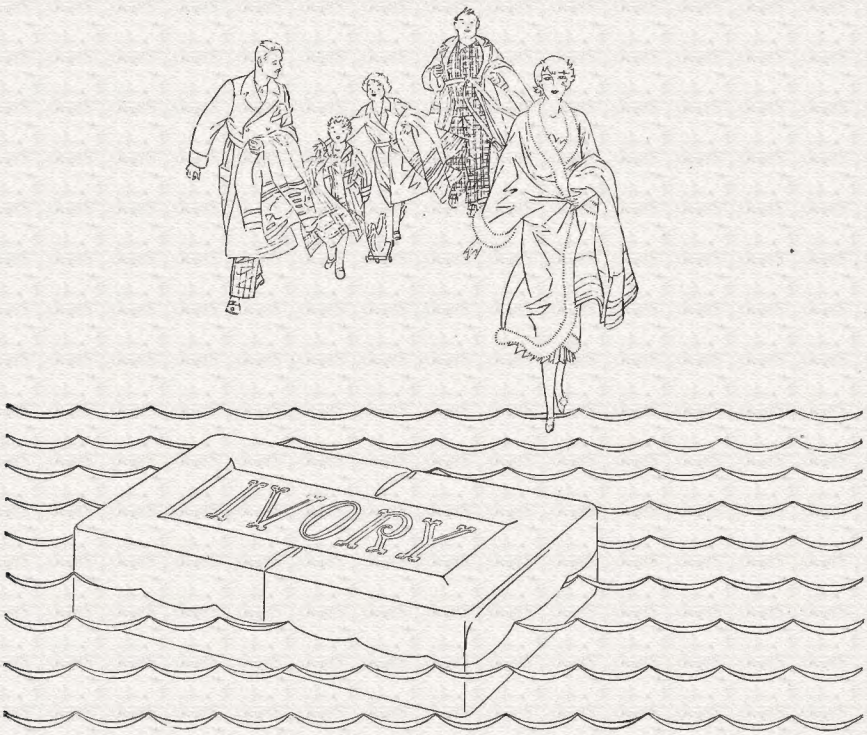

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The DUKE *and the* DUCATS

Tex MacDowell and Duke Daly, Border flyers, zoom down on a shady deal in a booming Texas oil town

By THOMSON BURTIS

ROBERT DALY, sometimes known as the Duke, climbed out of the trim little scout he had just landed on the McMullen airdrome. His eyes were still glowing as a result of one of the few intervals of complete happiness which life afforded him. There was an admixture of pain with the sheer delight of flying, however. Once he had been a regular Army flyer, instead of merely in the Reserve Corps, and a member of that same McMullen flight of the Border Patrol which the Army Air Service flew along the Rio Grande.

As he walked toward headquarters, one of the line of frame buildings on the southern edge of the tiny flying field, the almost boyish light in his eyes changed to the shadow which habitually darkened them. That he was not still a regular Army flyer, he realized, was due to the outlaw he had been before his Army days, and flying, for him, must always remain an occasional treat: just another installment of the payment for his past which would never be completed . . .

"Lieutenant MacDowell wishes to see you, sir, in headquarters."

The mechanic saluted smartly. Saluting on that small post was a rarity, because officers and men passed each other too frequently, but somehow the men always saluted Daly.

"Thanks," nodded the Duke, and at the same moment he saw the tall form of Lieutenant Tex MacDowell appear on the porch and start toward him rapidly.

He removed his helmet, revealing blond hair which lent the last touch of boyishness to his too perfect face. His clear cut features were like those of some statue. As a matter of fact they had been carved by plastic surgeons. A wreck, back in war days, had almost ruined his face, and the artificial one the medicos had fashioned was as lineless as a boy's. From the side he looked twenty-two or three. When one saw his eyes—the eyes of a man of thirty-one who had seen and suffered much—the contrast was such that few people could ever forget him.

"Listen, Duke," Tex called from twenty feet away, "how'd you like a week end

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

trip to that wild new oil town, Verona, with prospects of excitement?"

"Fine," Daly replied, without outward interest. Despite himself, he was customarily aloof and indifferent. "What's the idea?"

"Got a letter from dad. He's in the East and can't get away. He backed an old friend of his, named Henry Ivers, as a silent partner in an oil machinery business down there. They got into acreage some way, and are getting their eye teeth rooked out of them by some crook. Ivers don't know what to do, and dad wants me to go down and look over the land and see what can be done. Henry is a business man, not a rough and tumble bozo. Dad knew you were here and thought you might be of help. What say?"

"All right with me," nodded Daly, for all the world as if the prospect were as thoroughly appealing to him as it was to the lean Texan whose eyes were shining with enthusiasm. "Where is this Verona?"

"West of Laredo. They used to call it Park Forks."

Ghosts of the past rose, to drop a film over Daly's eyes and tighten his mouth. His face was a mask now. He had gambled along the Rio Grande.

"About fifteen miles or so north of the river, opposite a little Mexican village called Santa Verona, isn't it?" he asked quietly.

Tex, who knew Daly as no one else in the world did, studied him silently. He started to say something, and stopped abruptly.

"You can take a couple or three days off, can't you? I mean you aren't liable to get urgent orders from Washington—"

Daly shook his head. For more than three years he had been a special Government agent. His knowledge of the underworld had made him a valuable one, too. He had just finished a job here on the Border.

"Well, then," grinned Tex, "I vote we call up Henry Ivers right now and get started this afternoon, if it's all right with the captain. He said the trip in general was O.K, providing we didn't use our official position to further our

private ends, as it were. At that, in a town like Verona we're liable to run across stuff that'd interest the Government a good deal. Let's go see the cap. I hadn't figured on going until tomorrow until right this minute."

A MOMENT later they were facing stocky, spike pompadoured little Captain Kennard.

"Say, Cap," grinned the big Southener, "anything the matter with our shoving off this afternoon to help out my poor old father?"

Kennard's raucous laughter filled the room.

"Go ahead," he chuckled. "You wouldn't sleep a wink tonight if you didn't, and there'd be no use of having you around the place. Excitement is a disease with you, young man."

Which it was, almost, Daly reflected. The Texan seemed to have some perennial hunger within him which nothing but dangerous emergencies could assuage. A week of monotony, and he was a brooding, temperamental recluse, seeking liquor to deaden his senses. The Duke knew what that feeling was—something always beckoning him from around the corner—and the invariable disillusionment when one found that it was never so attractive as it seemed. But his own restlessness and discontent beat itself against the hard shell he had built around his real self, and the world rarely knew.

As they went out of the office, an orderly ran toward the hangars to give orders for their ship. They walked toward the row of tents which were the living quarters for the dozen officers of the patrol. MacDowell, momentarily serious, stopped and faced Daly.

"Listen, Duke," he drawled. "What's on your mind about this trip? Anything that I don't know about? I know you were around the Border as a—a gambler, and might have enemies. I'd like to know, so that—you know."

The commonplace words, said with a touch of shyness by the Texan, conveyed the same feeling to Daly which MacDowell had aroused years before. The same spirit shone through which had made Tex the first and only friend the emotionally starved Daly had ever had. Five years of want, fighting among the dregs of life, years in which he had lived his mental life alone and displayed to the world he lived in and despised a shell which the blows of fate had thickened, had brought to Daly what he had thought to be a total self-sufficiency. In MacDowell he had found the first understanding friend he had ever had. In a brutal effort to test him, to discover the basis of his apparent liking for the aloof stranger, the Duke had thrown his past in the big fellow's face—hobo, professional gambler, denizen of the underworld because he had been made so at fifteen. He had spared nothing, as though trying to repel the famous flyer whose friendship he really wanted so desperately.

And Tex had met the test. It had not been Daly's present position of respectability, even a certain eminence, which had attracted him. For what he had been, an outcast, or might be again, meant not a single, solitary damn to MacDowell.

The inference in his words now sent the unaccustomed warm glow through Duke Daly, and momentarily his eyes were soft. Tex wanted to have all the facts, so he could fight at Daly's right hand if necessary.

"You know," Daly said without emotion. "Remember the case of Jim Fitzpatrick, an old coon he shot—and so forth?"

MacDowell's eyes widened.

"And that was within fifteen miles!" he said very slowly. "I don't think it'll mean a thing, Duke. If I did I wouldn't bring you there. Not a soul will connect you with it—and if they do you were right."

"Haven't the Fitzpatricks any friends left since old Dave is in jail?"

"Some—but they're damn' quiet. I don't think there's a thing to worry about there."

As it turned out, there was nothing for the Duke to worry about—there. As he

was often to discover, however, the good men do lives after them—and when it has the appearance of evil, it seems to live forever.

TWO HOURS later the two flyers dropped their ton-and-a-half DeHaviland into the airdrome of the Border Patrol flight at Laredo. Within fifteen minutes the gas and oil tanks had been refilled, and they were in the air again. Considerable information regarding the town of Verona had also come their way from the flyers. If evidence was needed of the fact that an oil boom had changed conditions along that part of the border, the Duke thought to himself, a look from the air supplied it.

Laredo was the nearest railroad terminus, and that sizeable town had changed considerably since last he had seen it. Close to the railroad station gaunt frame warehouses had arisen like mushrooms, and the streets of the town were crowded. The one road which led back into the rolling mesquite was a sight to see. It crawled through the chaparral like a gray snake, and it was crowded with vehicles of all descriptions, from huge trucks to small wagons drawn by burros. It was rutted so deeply as to be almost impassable.

There was not a break in the clogged traffic between Laredo and Verona. Daly felt a thrill as, from five thousand feet, he looked down on the newly created town. It looked almost like a gargantuan circus lot, because temporarily it seemed to be built of canvas. Hundreds of tents of all sizes lined the main road, and side streets had been hacked from the mesquite. There were many crude shacks of all sizes, and footpaths were lined with every species of temporary structure, from pup tents to square, steel roofed frame buildings. Around what had evidently been the original cross roads, with its small cluster of permanent buildings, was the main part of town.

Verona was a tent city, almost a mile square already, and here and there through the mesquite there were isolated clusters of tents. The streets were so jammed with people that the circus illusion grew on him. No midway, just before show time, had ever been more densely populated. From the air it seemed that a man could have crossed any of the crude streets on the tops of the slowly moving vehicles. There were no sidewalks, and what were called streets, he could see, were merely trails, for the most part, and those trails had been gored by thousands of wheels until they were like freshly plowed fields. Many automobiles and trucks were stalled. Others were barely able to move.

"Gosh! If it ever rains not a wheel will turn for days!" he thought.

From the town as a nucleus, dozens of zigzag trails, hewn from the chaparral, snaked away in all directions. Derricks thrust themselves from the mesquite on all sides. Pipeline gangs were working here and there, and every road was full of vehicles. Jets of steam showed whitely in many places to indicate where drilling was going on, and here and there were large areas which were blackened with oil. He saw a half dozen sumps, the oil showing black inside them, and there were dozens of others being dug. Transportation was so difficult, doubtless, that storage tanks would be the last things brought in.

His heart leaped to the thrill of the raw power of it all. It was as though he were watching men at grips with Mother Nature herself, wringing her riches from her against overwhelming odds. There was an effect of tremendous struggle in the slowness with which the wagons and trucks moved. The gaunt derricks, in all stages of construction, seemed more like wreckage than like usable pieces of machinery. Drillers, roughnecks, pipe line men, and laborers swarmed over an area of three or four square miles like busy ants, and the town was like a teeming ant hill. Stuck out there in the middle of the wilderness, with every bit of food, to say nothing of machinery, transported from fifty miles away, it seemed

unbelievable. It was crude and ugly and sublime.

MacDowell turned around, his eyes glowing through his goggles. He pointed north of the town, and Daly nodded. There was a clearing there, and one airplane was standing in front of a canvas hangar.

Tex, who was flying, nosed the ship down and sent it into a tight spiral, directly above the town. Now Daly could see that derricks were being constructed within the limits of the settlement itself. The white city was studded with them. A quarter of a mile east of Verona a closely set group of derricks, their boilers already in operation and the roughnecks busy on the drilling floors, indicated the original well. Most of the derricks were black with oil, and a huge sump was half full. From this as a center the derricks spread in a circle, the forest of them growing thinner and thinner as the circumference of the circle was reached.

Daly shifted his attention to the field. It was small for a De Haviland, and spots on it testified to the fact that stumps had been pulled from its surface. However, it presented no problems to a flyer like MacDowell.

He glanced southward. Santa Verona, Mexico, was in view on the bank of the river. Opposite it, on the American side, a small settlement looked like a continuation of the Mexican town. The river was all of fifteen miles away, and the two towns combined looked no bigger than a man's hand. That had been the place where a certain tragedy had happened ten years before, and for a moment Daly's mind brooded over the past.

Then, as the twelve cylinder Liberty's roar decreased, and he felt the terrific wind against his right cheek which indicated a sideslip, he transferred his attention to the ground underneath him. The center of town was but two miles away, and as he glanced at it he thought:

"Seems as though there was a little excitement about us, at that! That's funny — they're used to airplanes."

It did seem that every living soul had stopped whatever he might have been doing, and was watching the big bomber come down. Tex had it sideslipping, right wing down. A hundred feet high and a little more than two hundred feet north of the field he brought it level, cut the gun completely, and glided toward the clearing. One solitary man stood beside the civilian ship, watching, and on the derrick floors of the wells close to the field Daly could see that all work had ceased. Four men on horseback were riding into the field as Tex brought the DH down on three points. It stopped rolling fifty feet from the hangar, and as they taxied up alongside the civilian ship the four horsemen rode to meet them.

The solitary man who had been standing alongside the ship went into the hangar.

"Funny way for a flyer to act," thought Daly.

He transferred his attention to the horsemen. They were lined up on the line, and as the De Haviland stopped rolling and they could control their horses better, they rode around on the side of it. MacDowell turned off the gas, and Daly climbed out while the motor was running itself out.

The horsemen dismounted silently. One man held the reins of all four horses as the other three walked toward the Duke.

"The welcoming committee," drawled Tex in his ear, and then said aloud:

"Howdy. This is Verona, I take it? You're not our guards for the ship, are you?" The man ignored the last question.

"Shore is. Stayin' long?"

The speaker was a very small, dried up little man of about forty-five, Duke estimated, and he was slightly ahead of his companions. He was bowlegged, but he wore expensive field boots instead of the cowboy boots which would have seemed more in keeping with his appearance. Riding breeches of whipcord, a wellmade flannel shirt, and an ornate sombrero

which had not cost a cent less than sixty dollars completed his costume. His face was weatherbeaten until it was a mahogany color, and two very cold, very keen green eyes looked speculatively at the flyers. They were narrowed, and there were a million wrinkles around them. His nose was long, and jutted forth boldly above a neatly trimmed mustache. He was a curious contrast—the clothes of a dandy, and the appearance of an oldtime cowpuncher.

"Just a couple of days," Daly answered.

One of the other two men laughed. He was tall and lean and dark faced, and his lips looked to be the kind which could twist easily into a sneer. He was dressed sloppily, his clothes spotted with oil.

"Yo're plannin' to stay that long? What fur?"

It was the little leader again, and his eyes flitted from one face to the other. There was a challenge in his soft voice—a sort of metallic ring.

Daly looked at him in amazement at the question.

"That," he stated evenly, "would seem to be our business."

The leader's face did not change, but the other two men chuckled. Not a particularly mirthful chuckle, Daly decided with rising interest. The third man was short and powerfully built, a disreputable sombrero cocked on one side of his head and making his scarred face look somewhat tougher than it would have ordinarily.

"Pretty cocky, eh, Newt?" he inquired, and the leader turned on him quickly.

"Keep yore trap shut!" he said softly, and the trap was shut without argument.

"Yo're Border Patrolmen, ain't yuh?" he asked quietly, and those eyes were like gimlets.

"Yes," nodded Tex. "But we're just here on a visit."

The leader expectorated a large quantity of tobacco juice.

"The hell yuh say," he drawled. "I notice yuh brought yore guns."

His eyes were on the machine guns which were mounted on the ship. His two companions drifted around the airplane, as though looking it over.

MacDowell was leaning negligently against the side of the fuselage, his hand playing with his Colt idly. Daly saw his eyes flame suddenly. His drawl was very slow when he finally spoke, but the danger signals were flying. Something in the attitude of the outwardly inoffensive little rider had aroused Daly's gorge, as well.

"Well, what the hell of it?" MacDowell asked him softly.

The stranger's eyes flitted from Daly's to MacDowell's. He walked forward slowly. The other two men, out of sight on the other side of the ship, made no sound. As he came forward the rider pushed his sombrero far back on his head, and Duke could see more of his face. He had a lantern jaw, hollow, creased cheeks, and those eyes, seen more plainly, were very wintry looking.

"Plenty of it, Mr. Patrolman!" he said with that harsh timbre suddenly obvious once more. "You wasn't sent for, was you?"

"No. We're not here on business."

"So you said. I'm tellin' you somethin'. You better go. Verona don't want you. We can handle our own affairs around here, and don't need no help from outsiders!"

Daly could scarcely believe his ears. He took a step forward, glancing meaningly at Tex.

"Listen, stranger," he said in that cool, detached voice of his, "we didn't ask you for any advice. And we expect to do just as we damn' please. We told you we weren't here on duty, but whether we are or not is none of your business. And since you've mentioned it, who the hell gave you any authority to speak for Verona?"

"Yo're pretty cocky, you boys, ain't you?" drawled the Verona man contemptuously. "I'm jest tellin' you two things. We're havin' a special election t'morrow, and I'm one o' the candidates for the job o' runnin' this town. We

don't crave yore help. We don't want no damn' airplane buzzin around, with guns on it, nor no Rangers nor Border Patrolmen nor anybody else hornin' in t' help us run our business."

Daly's mind took in the import of the stranger's words almost unconsciously as he thought of the possibilities in the situation.

"We're not here to run your business," Tex told him easily. "But now that we're on the subject, why are you so keen that we leave here? We came down for a vacation—"

"And it looks as though we might have some work to do and could start in on you."

Daly said that quietly. Somehow the personal side of the situation did not seem so important. He felt a vague resentment at the idea of this bandylegged little Southwesterner taking it upon himself to insult the Government in general.

FOR A long ten seconds the little Westerner's eyes held Daly's, and they were very cold and keen. When he finally spoke, Daly, who was ready for anything, was almost shocked at the tenor of his words.

"We ain't gettin' nowhere thisaway," the rider said, conciliation in his voice. His two comrades were standing by the tail surfaces of the ship, now, whispering to themselves. Duke could see them from the corner of his eye. "Now, listen. I ain't here t' get in bad with you boys, nor t' tell you what t' do. Don't git me wrong. Here's the situation. Verona's a funny town with a funny problem. We aim t' run it ourselves. Right at this time we ain't askin' or wantin' no outside interference. We don't want no outside cops, sheriffs, Rangers or whatnot runnin' around hog wild, arrestin' the wrong people and raisin' hell generally. This here's a bunch o' men got together from Smackover t' Tampico. It ain't even a town yet. We aim t' organize our own law and run our own show.

"And it's liable t' be very, very tough fur anybody from the outside t' horn in yet awhile. They ain't needed or wanted, and nobody could tell what'd happen. Why the hell should you want t' butt in? Honest, I'm doin' you a favor."

"It looks to me," Daly said calmly, "as though Verona was threatening any one, including us, who interfered."

The stranger looked long and hard at the Duke. He rolled and lit a cigaret with absentminded skill.

"My name's Jed Conklin," he said suddenly. "I own acreage, am drillin' wells, and got a heavy investment here. There's only one way t' run a boom town like this here one, which come up from nothin'. I aim t' have my money protected the best way. I ain't goin' into it in detail. But I'm askin' you—"

He hesitated. It seemed to Daly that a fundamental nastiness of temper—an impatience which he had kept repressed—suddenly was rising to the surface of Mr. Jed Conklin.

"In fact, I'm tellin' yuh tuh mind yore own business while yuh're here for yore own good! Keep yore hands off this town!"

"Suppose we say we'll do as we damn' please?" drawled MacDowell.

"Ho, ho, ho! Why, you old fool!"

It was a shout of laughter from the shorter of the Conklin henchmen. As he gave vent to those apparently hilarious words, he smote the taller man a mighty blow on the back.

To Daly it seemed that there had been a lack of spontaneity in the laugh, and the taller man stumbled forward as though the blow had been from a pile-driver. Half by instinct and half because of an idea which had suddenly assumed form in his mind, Daly leaped toward them.

The elevators of the De Haviland, of course, were hanging, their rear edges within inches of the ground. The big Verona man was falling toward them.

Daly covered the eight feet between him and the stranger in one bound. As the oil man's heavy boot was coming down on one elevator the flyer's fist crashed to

his jaw with all the momentum of his leap plus the skill which was the result of half a hundred fights.

The oil man staggered back, his foot brushing the linen of the control harmlessly.

"You would, would you!" Daly snapped coolly, and another blow to the side of the jaw felled the astounded Texan.

"Why, damn you—"

The smaller man had jumped at him, but Daly jumped backward with catlike quickness. His Colt was out before the other man's.

"Don't anybody move!" came MacDowell's vibrant voice.

His gun was out, too, trained on Conklin. Daly, his gun on the smaller henchman, and his eyes on his fallen foe, spoke very clearly.

"Trying to make sure our ship'll stay on the ground, by putting it out of commission, are you?" he inquired coolly. "Mr. Conklin, this is a very interesting party—"

"What the hell do you mean! Put them popguns up, you squirts!"

The faded little Southwesterner was suddenly boiling with rage. His eyes were snakelike, and his leathery face was working with emotion he could no longer control.

"What d'yuh mean, soakin' that man thataway?" he rushed on furiously. "By God, if you think yore uniforms is gonna git you anything in this here town you got another think comin'! Gun play you want, huh? We'll blow the top o' yore heads off, you—"

"Shut up."

It was MacDowell. He moved forward lightly and clapped his hand over the irate oil man's mouth.

"Listen here," Daly cut in steadily. His victim was still on the ground, dazed, and the little fat man seemed entirely nonplussed. "Your two men here deliberately framed up a dodge to put our ship out of commission. Maybe you knew about it, and maybe you didn't. It strikes me as a very peculiar thing for a respectable citizen to come out here, threaten officers and warn them not to interfere, and put their official equipment out of order. We ought to carry the three of you into town and put you in the lockup for attempted destruction of Government property and interference with officers of the law.

"But we won't, now. We're not here on duty—supposedly. But the property this ship is standing on is protected by the Government right now, and it starts twenty feet from the ship on all sides. Now get the hell off that property! Fast!"

For a fleeting second the Southwesterner stood immobile, his face a study in baffled fury. Something in the Duke's passionless tones bound his tongue, though, and he did not speak. His eyes shifted to the eyes of MacDowell, standing over him. Without a word he turned and walked away from the ship.

"Come on, you two," Daly said tersely. "If the big boy can't walk, carry him, Fatty!"

Fatty supported his partner, who was not too dazed to mumble curses.

"There's some news you might as well spread," called MacDowell. "We've arranged for a couple of guards, and their orders from now on'll be to shoot anybody that passes the dead line. Get that, Mr. Conklin?"

Mr. Conklin did not answer. As two horsemen rode into the field he and his henchmen rode away.

MacDowell, his eyes shining with the zest of the battle, lit a cigaret.

"I've seen dumb things, and peculiar things, and what have you," he stated, "but I'll be damned if I ever saw anything like this!"

"I can't get it at all," Daly admitted. "Great God, Tex, no man could be such a fool as to come right out and tip his hand if he was up to something criminal! Conklin comes right to us, and warns us in plain terms to keep out of things. Any dumbbell in the world would know that a man who did that was up to something illegal—and any dumbbell would know too much to do it if he

had any reason to be scared of the law!"

"You might figure he acted in good faith for the good of Verona," Tex ruminated. "Lots of these towns don't want law in the ordinary sense. They want women and booze and six-shooter law."

"But I'll be damned if they try to destroy Government property and deliberately alienate officers of the law."

"It might be that those two bozos originated the idea themselves, and the big boy had little to do with it," Tex suggested.

"Possible, but not probable. Here are the guards."

The two roughly dressed, stubbled bearded riders dismounted leisurely, and the heavier of the two inquired—

"MacDowell and Daly?"

"Right. You're the guards Mr. Ivers sent out?"

"Yes, suh."

Both men were armed, and looked thoroughly competent for a job which, within the last few moments, had assumed importance.

"Know Jed Conklin?" Daly asked them.

"Shore do," said the smaller man, wiping his mustache with the back of his hand.

"He just tried to put this ship out of commission. Looks as though some people in this town didn't want it to fly. So you may have work to do. The orders are this. Put up stakes in a circle twenty feet away from the ship, and shoot if anybody tries to get closer. You're guarding Government property now," Daly told them quietly.

He was watching the guards closely, and they showed no signs of surprise.

"That's funny," the tall one said ruminatively, scratching his incipient goatee. "Must be this here election's gonna be a humdinger."

Darkness was falling, and Daly could see no reason for questioning the guards further when more information could be obtained from Ivers. They were to use the guard's horses. As they walked toward them Tex remarked:

"That's a good ship there. Looks like a Robin's Cruiser to me. Notice the Liberty? It is a Cruiser."

Daly nodded. The ship was a heavy-set, thick winged model, with space for two passengers in the front seat. The pilot's cockpit was the rear one.

"She'll do about what the DH will, won't she?" he inquired absently.

"Uh huh—a little more."

They mounted, and as they were on their way across the field Tex remarked:

"I don't see why an election should make it necessary for a ship to be put out of order. If we planned to interfere, we couldn't do any good in the air. What do you make of that, Watson?"

"Who can tell what's up in a town like this only ten miles from the river? Do you figure, furthermore, that it's a bit peculiar for that man who was alongside the ship when we were coming down to disappear and fail to extend greetings to his fellow flyers?"

Tex grinned blissfully.

"Probably all a pipe dream," he chuckled. "But it doesn't hurt to hope that *something* might happen, does it? We've made a great start. One of the powerful men of the town hates us already, and we've got an unknown guy to fight for the honor and money of the family. This election, by all signs, should mean quite a fruity day tomorrow. All in all, Duke, my boy, I'm glad to be among you."

The big Texan was in his private idea of the seventh heaven. Daly smiled, his eyes momentarily warm.

"I'm not sorry," he said evenly. "In fact, I'm not too sorry that this Conklin chap has got me thoroughly and completely bewildered. He may be anything from just a dunce to an outlaw so sure of himself that he thinks he can run the Border Patrol as well as Verona."

"That'll probably be cleaned up in our minds after we talk to Ivers," Tex said. "Say, wouldn't it be a joke if he was the bozo who was rooking dad?"

THEY struck the main trail—it could not be called a road—half a mile from the field. It was choked with traffic of all descriptions. The two lines moved at a snail's pace, except for lone riders who galloped through the mesquite. The ruts were often a foot deep. Wagons and trucks laden with pipe and other equipment; passenger cars carrying scouts, drillers, and mechanics; tool pushers; food trucks—all were part of the line. At intervals of a few hundred yards other roads branched off to wells or prospective wells on either side. There were many vehicles stuck in the sand. There was an effect of mighty effort and sweaty industry. The fact that the swift Texas darkness had fallen seemed to make no difference to the throng of workers. Before the night was over the flyers were to make certain of the fact that work in the Verona field went on twenty-four hours a day.

"We don't seem to be too popular," Daly observed.

"Right you are," agreed Tex as they approached the town. "Listen to that bozo."

One of a group of men riding a small truck had called tauntingly—

"The reformers are with us!"

Many of the curious glances they received were far from friendly. Sometimes what amounted to insults were hurled at them from the protection of darkness.

"These roughnecks don't want their fun spoiled," Daly commented. "They think we're the law."

As they came into the outskirts of the town the feeling grew in strength. On each side of the road solid lines of pedestrians were moving toward town between lines of tents and shacks. The two flyers were conspicuous, and even the contained Daly felt self-conscious as they became the center of attention.

"Look at the Boy Scouts!" was a favorite remark from the oil spotted, crudely dressed men on either side, and their passage down the street became a long ordeal.

Before it was over Tex had a dangerous glint in his eye, and Daly himself was tightlipped and ready for trouble.

"They haven't even got electric lights in most places yet," Tex observed as they turned into the main street. "Good Lord, what a sight!"

And Daly agreed with him. Flaring torches made the street as light as day, and flickering shadows in the background lent it an air of spookiness. The street was solid with slow moving traffic, the roadbed a rough sea of ruts and sandy bogs. Four lines of traffic barely moved. Tents alternated with unpainted temporary buildings, and there were dozens of other structures on which work was progressing feverishly. And everywhere there were men—sliding between cars, choking the sidewalks, so thick that there was scarcely room for their feet. From either side there came music of every known variety—hand organ, mechanical pianos, personally operated violins and guitars, and a few portable organs.

"Most of these places are dives, it looks to me," observed Tex. "Look at that place!"

It was a huge frame structure, entirely open on the street side. Inside it a huge bar extended all along the right hand side, and ten bartenders were busy attending to the mob which fought to get a place close to the counter. A good many tables occupied the remainder of the front part of the building, and there were quite a few women, plainly hostesses, helping oil men to spend their money. In the rear was a small dance floor.

Taunts, some humorous and others nasty, were hurled continuously at the flyers. It was a seething tent city, a young, raw giant bellowing to the night sky. Daly felt a sense of surging life in it, and his heart beat faster. Anything could happen there. Drunkenness, a wild abandon were in the very air. The crowds which he could look down upon included every type of man, from dirty roughneck to well dressed big company scout, and a sprinkling of women.

"Every Mexican gold digger from

Tampico north must have flocked here," he told Tex.

"There are more spigs than Americans —and there are a lot of 'em among the men, too."

"They sure aren't secret about their good times," Daly said, half to himself. "Look at this street!"

Almost every building and tent was wide open on the street side. Some of them were lighted with electricity, others by kerosene or gasoline, and the solid line of brightly illuminated squares gave a carnival effect.

"I'd like to see ten square feet of space, inside or outside, with nobody occupying it," Tex remarked. "Look at that sign. Cots ten bucks a night, huh? Say, if Ivers and Dad don't clean up here I don't know where they ever will. Let's ask where the Verona Machinery Equipment Co. has its place of business."

He leaned down and asked a man in a huge sombrero who was walking alongside him. Pedestrians were in the street, passing between buildings, everywhere. More than ever the town was like a crowded circus lot, even to many loud ballyhoo artists.

The man looked up, showing a face so dark that he might have been a Mexican. As he took in Tex's uniform his eyes widened, and a smile overspread his countenance.

"That big building—frame—on the right hand side," he said, pointing. "You are Mr. MacDowell!"

"What?" asked the surprised Tex as the man hesitated. "Do I know you?"

"No."

He looked long at the two flyers, grinning as though at a private joke. He pushed his hat back on his head, walking along beside the horses. His hair was blond. He was thin faced and lantern jawed, and his eyes sloped upward from his nose, giving his face a certain oriental cast. It was subtly cruel.

"I knew Mr. Ivers was expecting a couple of flyers," he said. "Hope you have a good time. So long."

He turned, and fought his way through the crowd.

"That bozo acted as though he was enjoying our being here," Tex stated. "Maybe he's one of Ivers' men. Say, Duke, this town is the damnedest place I ever hit. A pilot runs away from meeting us, the next guy gets in a fight with us, two bozos try to wreck the plane, and the bunch in general would be far happier if we weren't here. Maybe I'm getting nervous, but this last gink, the first one to speak politely, acted as though we were the principal ingredient in a Roman holiday."

Daly smiled briefly. He had become entirely anesthetic to the curious, often belligerent, looks from the crowds, and the frequent razzings which came from them.

"He certainly was having a laugh to himself. Looked as though he might be a halfbreed. You don't suppose Ivers confided in him, do you?"

"We'll soon tell," drawled Tex, swinging off his horse.

The big two story building, constructed of unpainted boards, had two small windows and one door in its fifty foot front. Painted on its front in crude lettering was the name of the company. On one side of it was a huge square tent which was a barroom and dance hall. On the other was a low, flat roofed frame structure which was closed to the street. Sounds of high revel came from it, however, and streams of men were passing in and out its wide door.

They led their horses down the alley alongside the Ivers building. There was a platform for loading machinery toward the rear of the building. They tied their horses, and came around to go in the front door.

A group of men were talking in the small space in front of a counter. In the rear of the counter long lines of shelves held all sorts of tools, and further to the rear heavy machinery could be seen—pumps and other oil equipment.

"Where can we find Mr. Ivers?" asked Tex.

The six men looked the two flyers over leisurely. Finally one of them jerked his finger toward a stairway on one side.

"Upstairs," he said briefly.

As they mounted the stairs Daly heard them whispering more or less excitedly.

"We certainly do create attention," he told Tex. "Damned if I'm not beginning to believe there's something more here than meets the eye!"

"Here we are!" stated MacDowell.

AT THE front of the floor, which was mainly given up to the storage of blankets, cots, and lighter equipment, was a partition which extended the full width of the building. There were two doors, one marked "office". It was open, and Daly could see a very fat man bending over a desk.

"Hello, Mr. Ivers," Tex said from the doorway, and the man turned around ponderously.

He lumbered to his feet, and shook hands. His fat face expanded in a smile, and his eyes receded to mere pinpoints as the flesh gathered around them. He was bald headed, and wore eyeglasses, and must have weighed a full three hundred pounds, Duke thought. He was six feet tall, at least, and about that big around.

"This is Mr. Daly," Tex introduced them. Ivers' grip was hard and firm.

"Well, well, it's been fifteen years since I've seen you, Lee," Ivers remarked as he pulled a bottle from his desk and took out some tumblers. "Have a drink."

Daly had a sudden shock as he saw Ivers in profile. The fat, jovial countenance seemed to change. His nose curved slightly, and his cheekbones were very high. He seemed almost without eyes, from the side, too. There was strength and aggressiveness in his profile.

As he turned to pass them the drinks he was not smiling. Because of the layers of fat around his eyes they gave the effect of gray slits of light set very far back in his head, peering forth from protecting flesh. It was like another and vastly different personality, wearing that body as a blind.

"He's sure looking me over plenty," Daly thought.

Ivers was darting quick looks at him constantly, while talking personalities with MacDowell.

"Well, Mr. Ivers," Tex said finally, "The Duke here and I have our ears out a foot to find out what the hell's up and why we're here."

Ivers leaned back in his chair, his hands folded over his huge paunch. There was silence in the barren office. Its only furniture was the desk, three straight chairs, and a filing cabinet. From the street came the ceaseless drone of the milling crowds, shot through with music and ribald laughter and shouting. Daly was quiet and at ease, and he smoked a cigaret with his eyes on the ceiling as he felt Ivers' eyes boring into him.

"Well, Lee," Ivers said finally, "I needed assistance because I've been a business man all my life and I realize my limitations. First, the general situation you know pretty well. This is unique among oil towns because there was no nucleus of a town here—no substantial organized local element. It's a collection of six or seven thousand hardbitten oil men, adventurers, highjackers, and thugs both male and female, thrown together from half a dozen oil centers. There's no organization, but there will be one tomorrow. In general, it's dog eat dog, and every man for himself."

"He talks like an educated man," Daly thought as he listened.

Ivers' voice was throaty, almost wheezy, but his words were pronounced clearly and correctly, and with deliberation.

"Now then," Ivers went on, "I saw the possibilities of the field before the first well came in. I laid my plans for this business, and got half of the capital from your father. When the first well hit I had a fleet of trucks on the way, machinery shipped the next day, and was installed in this building almost before the world knew there was a boom. And a right tidy business it is, too. There isn't a dollar's

worth of goods on these floors that isn't sold, and there are carloads on the way that were sold before they were shipped.

"I wasn't satisfied, though. I did something I seldom do, with your father's approval. Of course you know that he and I have done business, as partners and opponents both, for twenty-five years. The old hellion has beat me out of a fortune when we were against each other! I think he trusts my judgment, however. I invested twenty-two thousand dollars for us both in acreage, all bought from Mexicans and negroes in small lots. It's right here."

He took out a blueprint of the field. It was divided into a thousand areas, small and large, and he pointed to a section north east of town which was plainly marked, "Ivers' acreage".

"It looked good then, and wonderful now," Ivers continued. "The first well, Derringer Number 1, was a mile away. But the fault formation and all indications pointed to it being good stuff. Derringer himself had corraled all the acreage around his wildcat. Another well was being sunk, offset from our acreage, which was proving up. Since then—it's Thomas Number 1, here—it's come in for ten thousand barrels of high grade oil.

"Right now this acreage, leased at from fifty to two hundred dollars an acre, is worth in round numbers from a thousand an acre up. There are wells in, or looking good, all around it. Not thirty thousand barrel ones, but good ones. I should say your dad's holdings and mine could be sold tomorrow for a hundred thousand."

"It does look as though you were a good business man," Tex observed. "What's the trouble?"

"Just this. As I said, this acreage was leased, got on option, and otherwise secured from individual Mexican and negro farmers, all ignorant. Now the situation is this: Derringer—Slats Derringer, driller of the original well—had scared and forced and bribed these twenty small owners to swear that they were forced by my agents to sell their leases—coerced into deals they didn't want to make. Every damn' one of them has been forced by Derringer to repudiate their agreements with me, and to make new ones, at a slightly higher price with a small percentage of the profits, to him."

"Well I'll be damned," Tex said softly, and looked at the immobile Daly.

Daly was listening closely, but said nothing.

"You see where we are. Twenty-two thousand sunk. If those landholders stick to their story, the land will eventually belong to Derringer, and we're stuck. He'll fight forever, and has the money to do it. The best that could happen is to have it go years in the courts—and everybody lose. As far as profits are concerned, we're tied tighter than a drum. By the time it's settled, even if it's in our favor, we'll have spent thousands, the pool will probably be drained, and the oil under our property will have seeped away and produced from offset wells. Any way you take it, we're stuck."

"Who is this Derringer, and how does he get away with it?" asked Daly.

"There," stated Mr. Ivers impressively, "is the nub of the whole proposition. He's the man we've got to tangle with, and beat."

He took out a stogie, and lighted it with deliberation. He settled back in his chair again, and started talking directly to Daly.

"Slats Derringer has been a big driller for years—sometimes twenty rigs in a field. He's made a lot of money, one way or another, and he's the smartest independent oil operator this far south. He came in here from Mexico and drilled this wildcat. He started tying up acreage before he brought her in. When he did that, that was my cue to get ready for business. That's what I think of his judgment.

"No sooner had he hit oil than he brought into this town about five hundred men he knew. Most of 'em had worked for him. Others were friends. He had roughnecks, drillers, dive keepers—a Derringer mob gathered from a

dozen fields and former boom towns. He's got money himself, and I think two Dallas men are backing him to the limit. There seems to be no limit to his capital.

"The result of all this is easy to see. Before this town was well under way Derringer owned more than half the good looking acreage, bought for a song, and, his organized mob, growing every day was running things. We've got no officials yet, nominally, but actually Slats runs the works. He isn't particular about how, either. If he wants machinery, he takes it, pays for it, although it's priceless at this time, and asks the real owner what the hell he's going to do about it. His friends own the principal dives—and other saloon keepers are liable to find their places of business wrecked if they don't throw in on Derringer's side. Tomorrow he'll be elected chief cook and bottlewasher of the town, be the head of the vigilantes or whatever the law'll be, and be officially in office. He is the high muckymuck, the political boss, the richest man, the most active driller, the biggest owner of acreage, and all the rest of the works. I'm telling you the truth when I say that I have been forced to give him machinery which was sold to somebody else three times. I tried to hold out once—and that was enough."

"He sounds," drawled Tex, "like what might be called a worthy foeman."

"And a crooked one. He's the boy that owns our acreage now. Naturally those negroes and spigs are scared to death of him. There isn't a chance that they'll ever throw in on our—the right—side."

"He aims to be the king of the field, eh?" asked Daly.

"Exactly. And he will be. The big companies are watching, waiting a bit longer for the field to prove itself, before stepping in and taking it over. Slats Derringer wants to be kingpin of a field in full operation, from pumping stations to loading racks, and to turn it over for a healthy few million and retire, I guess. He has ambitions to be a new oil king, and I guess he will be. It's a cinch that he'll take his pick of everything—and anything he wants and can't get will be quite a burden to its owner."

"Tex got to his feet as though impatient for action. His brown hair, usually neatly parted, was now down over his eyes and he pushed it back.

"Well, where do we come in?"

"In the first place, there's no use right now of even thinking of bucking Derringer. There wouldn't be a chance. I am outwardly good friends with him, laughing off what he's done by the old oil field motto of getting away with what you can. I acknowledge myself outwitted, so to speak, and he is one of my best customers, of course. Any day, however, he'll be around to take over this business and hire me to run it for him. Wait and see.

"However, I do think that we ought to do this. Get at least a part of our legitimate profit out of the acreage, some way or other and then sell it to him at what we paid for it—which he's willing to give. And it's worth a hundred thousand! That is, he'll give the original owners the money, if they need it, to return your father and me what we paid them."

He stopped talking, and took a meditative drag on his cigar.

"I forgot to mention another string to his bow," he went on finally. "He also owns the biggest gambling house in town, right next door here."

Those impersonal eyes were suddenly gleaming as they rested on the Duke's emotionless countenance.

"He sure has got this town tied up!" Tex drawled.

"That is, he backs it," Ivers said. "A gambler named Draw One Donnelly, last from Smackover, runs it for him. Operated in Tia Juana and Havana before hitting the oilfields. But I know absolutely that it's Derringer's money. He's getting the *dinero* out of this field from all directions."

"Well, I don't know. That's why you're here. When I give you proof of the fact that Derringer has openly robbed us

of seventy-five thousand dollars, probably you'll agree with me that we needn't be too honest about our own methods of getting it back. As a matter of fact, he's a crook every way. Even his gambling games—when there are big players—are crooked."

Suddenly Tex threw back his head and laughed. Daly grinned, and Ivers permitted himself a smile.

"I know that from a friend of mine who got taken for plenty. When a man or men, new rich oil men or whoever they may be, are live wires who want to play real poker with no limit, they're taken to a private room where a house man, Donnelly himself, presides. There are always enough men to make up the game. Two men—Donnelly and a confederate whom the sucker does not know is a confederate—are sure to be there. If there aren't any other customers—and there usually are, a couple of supposed customers wander in. They're house men too. The net of the proposition is that any man is playing against from two to four men working together—raising and reraising each other and all that. It won't take you ten minutes, with this tip, to discover the truth of it yourselves. Often Derringer himself takes a hand—he loves poker. He's as crooked as his house. Whenever he isn't too busy he spends his evenings that way."

"He sure is a versatile boy," Tex said thoughtfully.

"Surely is," agreed Ivers. "I thought that perhaps you fellows might like to go into the gambing house, play a while, and look Derringer over. I've got a telegram here from your father—he realizes that we may have to spend money to get our money back—saying that he'll put up his half of whatever amount I decide is necessary. We'll pretend that you're able to lose plenty—and let you size up Derringer, prove to yourselves he's a damned crook, and—"

"Say, listen," Tex interrupted, and the silent Daly could see he was afire with excitement. "Suppose we do that. Suppose we prove to ourselves that he's a crooked card player as well as a crook every other way. Duke, what's wrong in our fighting fire with fire, and crooking him right back? Go in there and play square poker, of course, losing money deliberately until we're sure we're being rooked. Then go right back at 'em!"

For a moment there was silence. Then Ivers leaned forward.

"That's a possible idea," he said crisply. "And I'm calculating on risking ten thousand dollars for my share. My check is good for twenty, to make up Bill's share. Maybe more—say fifteen thousand a piece. I don't know—"

"If he's so powerful, it seems like the best way to me!" MacDowell said slowly. "After, of course, we're dead certain that we're only fighting fire with fire."

There was a queer feeling within Daly. For some reason he could not accept the situation as anything but totally unreal—a dream. Suddenly he leaned forward.

"Mr. Ivers, would you be willing to trust the playing of all that money to Tex and me?"

Ivers played with his watch chain, and did not look up as he replied:

"His father thinks Tex a fine poker player, and you have that reputation—"

"From whom?"

Ivers raised his eyes. Daly was tense.

"From Tex, originally, and from his father to me."

Daly relaxed slightly. Then Ivers did not know that he had been forced into crooked gambling, years before, by an older man, when starvation was close upon him. And that he had been one of the most successful of the card men, because of his youth and breeding. Then he laughed at himself. How could Ivers know anything like that?

"ARE THESE them Army officers?" It was a voice from the doorway. A tall, very thin, very hard looking man, his blond hair tousled and his chin covered with a thin beard, was standing there. His hard gray eyes rested on Ivers.

"Yes," Ivers answered, studying the man.

"I got a note for you," the stranger informed the flyers, and handed it to Daly, who was nearest him.

It was brief and to the point.

> Mind your own business and don't interfere with anything while you're in this town. As long as you do that, you'll be all right.

Daly handed it to Ivers, his eyes on the messenger. As the man started to go Daly jumped forward. He spun the stranger around, and their faces were very close together.

"Who sent that note?" he demanded evenly.

"I was told not to tell," grinned the man impudently.

"But you will tell—now."

The roughneck pushed his hair back from his eyes. His gimlet eyes gleamed with sardonic mirth as he repeated mockingly:

"No, I won't tell—now. None of my business. I'm jest a messenger."

Daly's mind was made up in a split second. What was on the schedule for Verona during the next twenty-four hours he did not know. He did know that he resented, personally and officially, the attitude of Verona toward himself and Tex. And that the more they knew the better they would be off.

Again the bearer of the threat turned to go, a mocking grin on his bony face. Daly, tight lipped but self-controlled, spun him around again.

"Hey, who do you think—" the man started nastily, but he stopped suddenly.

A Colt was pressed against his shoulder, and Daly's gray eyes were not easy to look into.

"You're going to tell what you know right now," Daly said with an equanimity which was more venomous than rage would have been. "You're going to do it within thirty seconds. If you don't, I'm going to shoot you right through that shoulder of yours. If you don't tell then, you're going to be taken to Laredo, and sweated until you do. You're not going to get out of this room alone. This may be Verona, but we're not afraid of you or your boss. Now, damn you, think while I count ten!"

Daly was utterly sincere, and he left no doubt of what he meant to do. Ivers was as though paralyzed. Tex, standing behind Daly, said nothing.

Slowly Daly counted. The man's cockiness disappeared like magic. He was like a rat in a trap.

As the count reached five, very slowly, his eyes remained frozen to Daly's. At seven his mouth was open, and there was desperation in his eyes. At nine the inexorable Daly, mouth a thin, cruel line, was snarling the word down into his face.

"At ten I shoot," he said quietly, "and here goes."

"Don't shoot!"

The man's nerve broke.

"It was Jed Conklin and Barny Opper!" he half shouted. "They told me to bring it here."

"Why? Do you know? Talk!"

The man looked as though he had started to pet a house cat, and it had turned into a lion.

"Jed Conklin!" Ivers said slowly. "What's he up to?"

"I don't know," the man said earnestly. "Except that there's somethin' up."

"Tomorrow?" demanded Tex.

"No, tonight! Does that satisfy you? That's all I know. Lemme go now, huh? I'd git killed by Barny Opper if he knew I told—"

"Go ahead," Daly told him, and the man left, head down in humiliation.

"Couldn't depend on the truth of what he said, anyhow," Daly commented easily. "I guess I did the right thing. Mr. Conklin, it appears, had important plans afoot, and our safety is none too sure, Tex. Know him, Mr. Ivers?"

"Sure," Ivers said absently. He got up and began pacing the floor thoughtfully. "He's Derringer's only rival, and about half as strong. He wants to run the town too. He hasn't got a chance. Derringer has stolen his stuff, and fought him tooth and nail to drive him to the wall. Jed, you might say, represents the better

element, although nobody likes him. Nasty chap—"

"He's sure acting very funny," Tex remarked. "As though he was going to pull off a big job. Listen to this."

As Tex told briefly the events of the afternoon which concerned Conklin, Ivers stood motionless, his fat legs spread widely and his face without a trace of expression. The flesh seemed to fold more tightly around his eyes, however, until that impression of a stranger looking forth from the flesh which disguised him became more powerful than ever.

When MacDowell had finished Ivers scratched his head absently. Daly thought that he was much more impressed than he seemed to be. Before saying a word he made one slow turn of the room, his head down in thought.

"Jed's got something up his sleeve, sure as hell," he said finally in that throaty wheeze. He seemed to be trying to digest the possibilities in the situation. "Of course, most of this town don't give a damn. There are two organized minorities—Derringer's and Jed's. Derringer's is stronger. The rest of the town'll just be satisfied with whatever happens. Jed aims to have things happen this way. He's got a coup prepared, and he wants no law in the shape of patrolmen, or any other brand of it. Well, I'll be damned. So the little rooster's laid a trap of some sort—"

He ceased talking, and resumed his walk. Daly thought that he was considerably exercised over the situation for a man who had little interest one way or the other.

"Of course he has—he hates Derringer," he reminded himself. Aloud he said:

"Funny situation, isn't it? Here you hate Derringer and we're planning to rook him plenty. At the same time, we're in a sort of feud with our principal ally, although he doesn't know it."

Ivers nodded, his fleshy face blank.

"Well," he said abruptly. "Let's get set on this poker business."

He sat down, but his heart did not seem to be in the project as it had been.

"Just for your own information," he said absently, "here are the papers showing Bill and I the legal owners of this acreage. Within ten or fifteen minutes you'll find the game crooked. That's certain."

Daly and Tex examined the papers casually. There was no doubt of their genuineness.

"Now," Ivers said, "how do you plan to work things? As I said, I'm a babe in arms along that line, although I've played a little small poker. Inasmuch as you're going to be playing with ten thousand dollars of mine, I'm naturally interested in the *modus operandi*."

Duke noted that Latin phrase. Mr. Henry Ivers was evidently a man of parts. He was becoming more and more interested in the past of this merchant of the frontier who betrayed education and experience aside from that gained in such places as the Yukon and the Texas border.

MacDowell looked over at Daly, and Ivers' eyes also seemed to gravitate in the direction of the slim blond young man with the youthful face.

"I think we'd better forget crooked stud dealing," Daly said evenly, "except as an occasional thing. It would spoil our draw game to sit side by side, and perhaps I can get away with an occasional stud hand unassisted. Now on draw we'd better have at least three sets of signals, change them every ten hands, and perhaps we can get away with our share of the boodle. If there's an innocent outsider in the game, we'll return his money afterward."

He described the signals in detail, and for fifteen minutes various matters which might arise were taken up. Henry Ivers sat there, immobile and expressionless, but his eyes were very bright.

"Well," he said finally, getting up from his chair, "let's get you boys a quick bite to eat and then let you go to it. While you're eating I'll fix up a twenty thousand dollar credit—no, I believe I'll make it thirty thousand. That game's liable to

be very big. What a dumb-bell I am—I never thought of this dodge—and Bill talking about Lee's poker playing for four years!"

A HALF hour later Ivers got them at the hot dog stand where they had eaten, and was escorting them into the door of Donnelly's. Facing the door, and only ten feet from it, was a long bar with four bartenders at work. At one end of it there was a door, and over the low partition dividing the shallow barroom from the rear there came the never ending, unmistakable sound of many men gambling. Waiters were very busy, purveying to the back room.

Ivers led them through the door. Daly's eyes took in the scene quickly. There were at least twenty-five tables scattered over the huge structure, each in charge of a house man with an eyeshade over his eyes. Klondike, twenty-one, roulette, stud and draw poker, faro, keno—all were there. In the rear of the room two huge green crap tables were surrounded by a throng of men. In the center of the room a barred cashier's cage held three men—one cashier and two guards, both armed with sawed off shotguns as well as revolvers.

"You'll play upstairs," Ivers told them. "Here's Donnelly now. See that man standing by the crap tables—the tallest one? That's Derringer. I think he'll play with you, if he has time. Mr. Donnelly, this is Mr. MacDowell and Mr. Daly."

Duke Daly had seen a thousand of Donnelly's type. He was of medium height, slightly bald, carefully dressed, and his smooth, fleshy face held a speciously genial smile while cool black eyes mirrored no emotion whatever. His grip was neither strong nor weak. He looked like a carefully groomed denizen of a city underworld. His mouth was full lipped, and bracketed in two very deep wrinkles.

"I've heard of your father," he told MacDowell. "Glad to know you. Mr. Ivers here has said that he stands behind you for any amount, and I guess you want a real game, eh?"

His smile seemed to convey admiration for two real gamblers.

"That's us," Tex said with a grin. "We've got some money, and crave action."

"We have a private room upstairs," Donnelly told them. "Over there is Mr. Derringer. He's willing to play—one of the wealthiest men in town—and a rich little lease hound named Dave Harris, who likes a good game. I'm going to play myself, to fill out the game and because I crave action, personally."

Again that wide, oily smile, which did not change those hard eyes. Daly felt the fundamental coldness and calculation in the man.

"Of course," he went on with apparent frankness, "our usual house cut of five per cent, deducted from all stacks bought, will be in order. That's mild for this racket, don't you think?"

Daly nodded, Donnelly seemed to be talking mostly to him, despite the fact that he had said nothing. His eyes rested persistently on the Duke, as though trying to figure him out. It was almost as though he sensed a familiar something about him which puzzled him. Daly thought back to the old days, and was certain, however, that he had never run across Mr. Draw One Donnelly. Possibly Donnelly had seen him, however, or heard of him. The change in the flyer's face, due to the operation, frequently puzzled people who had known him well.

"Let's go up," suggested Donnelly. "I'll get Slats and Dave right now."

"I'm leaving you," Ivers said. "I'll be in my office when you get through. Sure Derringer is going to play, eh? Well, good luck!"

He smiled a very wide and beaming smile, and waddled out of the noisy, smoke filled room.

"We play against three," Daly said in low tones as Donnelly went after Derringer. "They'll be doing a whole lot of raising just on their weight of money

against us. It looks like never quitting on good hands for us, always providing Ivers was right."

Tex nodded. Both had their eyes on Derringer, who was walking toward them. He was taller even than MacDowell, who was six feet two, and his lank body was slim and bony looking. His face was long and thin, the brow high and craglike over deep set, fierce looking eyes. His bold nose curved over a thin, almost lipless mouth, and his cheeks were so hollow that his face was merely leathery skin stretched tightly over the protruding bones. His iron gray hair grew to a point over his forehead, and it stood straight up in a high pompadour, like a topknot.

His piercing blue eyes darted quick glances at the two flyers, and he shook hands with crisp strength.

"Glad to know you," he said tersely, his voice deep and harsh. "I may not be able to play long, but others will happen in. I hate to break up a game."

"Dave'll be right up," Donnelly informed them, and led the way up narrow stairs.

THE SECOND floor room was devoted exclusively to card games, all played with silent intentness. These, evidently, were big players. They were of various types, but leaned mostly to older men whose clothing subtly indicated their higher positions in the Verona scheme of things. Daly thought that most of them were owners, or technical men. He did not see one man who looked like a roughneck or small salaried tool pusher or driller.

The room which they were to use was not a room, really—it was rather one of a series of alcoves, separated from each other by rude partitions. The side toward the main room was wide open.

Harris arrived as they were sitting down. He was a small, consumptive looking Jew, with oily black hair and a tremendous hooked nose. He was dressed in blue serge, and his eyes were almost always on the ground. He was self-possessed, and his movements were quick as a cat.

"He's got every mark there is of an experienced croupier," Daly thought.

On a side table Donnelly set a rack of chips.

"What's you gentlemen's idea of the original take-out?" he inquired. His fleshy face became more round as he grinned. "Let's make it a real game, eh? Two thousand stacks?"

"O.K.," Daly found himself saying. "And I should say a two thousand dollar limit, at the outside—or table stakes."

"Table stakes," rasped Derringer.

The chips were counted out as they sat down. Tex and Daly took chairs in the positions they had arranged between themselves. Donnelly was on Daly's right, and Harris on his left. To Harris's left was Derringer, and Tex was between the oil man and Donnelly.

"One thing we might settle," Daly said quietly. "Ivers guarantees our payment, of course. What I mean is, do we get paid off in cash?"

"Absolutely, you fellow!" Donnelly assured him with that pretended blitheness. Derringer permitted himself a wintry grin. Harris was expressionless, his hands playing with his chips, stacking them and restacking them with lightning like speed. "What do you think we have those guards for? There's more than a hundred thousand dollars cash in this house tonight, and it'll be a lot more before long."

As the first deal started five men took seats at a table in front of the alcove, a house man with them who dealt nothing but stud.

Daly settled down to the ferocious concentration which was one of the reasons why he was a poker player who seldom, if ever, lost against the average competition. The others were silent, too.

He watched every hand like a hawk. He wondered how much to lose, if the game was crooked, before finally deciding that it was. It so happened that he broke even in the first seven hands—and that they told the tale.

On the second hand he went in with three tens, drawing two cards. Donnelly had opened for fifty dollars, and drew one card. Derringer had stayed, and also drew one. Donnelly bet a hundred dollars, and Daly raised a hundred. Derringer re-raised two hundred, and Donnelly promptly re-raised a full five hundred dollars—practically his stack.

"Might as well find out now as any time, cheap," Daly thought, and called.

As Derringer threw his hand into the deck Daly, as though by accident, thrust his hand forward and the cards fell face up. A four card flush.

"Sixes and fours," Donnelly said sourly as Daly showed his threes.

"Heavy raising and re-raising on nothing, believing I'd surely lay down my threes against two raising one card draws!" thought Daly.

Tex looked at him questioningly. Perhaps because he was ultrasensitive, Daly did not give the signal to start their own scheme of play. On the seventh hand, however, assurance was made doubly sure.

This time it was Tex, who stuck stubbornly on kings and eights against the raising and re-raising of three three-card draws, until his stack disappeared as he called a final seven hundred dollar raise, on Derringer's part. The other two, who had been apparently so strong, dropped.

Derringer had just a pair of jacks.

"Can't bluff a thing in this game!" he rasped.

"No," thought Duke. "Not with us knowing your racket. But when you boys start getting some good hands, or if we didn't know what you were up to, how you'd clean us!"

He glanced at Tex, and nodded. The crooked battle was on.

During the first half dozen hands after that there was little action. Neither he nor Tex had anything to speak of, one way or another. On the seventh hand it was the Duke's deal. Tex signaled a small pair. Daly himself had a pair of kings. No one opened, so Daly did, for twenty-five dollars.

Harris and Derringer both stayed, which surprised Daly somewhat. Tex knew what he had to do. It was a hand where, by sheer weight of money between them, they could probably win on nothing.

"Raise it fifty," drawled Tex, "just on prospects."

Daly's eyes narrowed when Donnelly stayed. He and Tex were playing against three men. He had caught none of their signals yet. Probably they were planning to do again the same thing he and Tex were—win by weight of combined money.

"Knowing I'm best to go in," Daly said calmly, "I re-raise two hundred dollars!"

Harris and Derringer had passed opening the pot, but stayed for the raises.

MacDowell, his big body radiating his utter absorption in the situation and his joy in it, surveyed his cards carefully. Then:

"This hand of mine is going to be worth everything or nothing," he announced with a grin. "I tilt her five hundred."

"Same here, big boy," said Donnelly with that specious smile, and put in his stack.

Literally thousands of hours of poker, often played under conditions where his life itself was at stake if he slipped, had given the Duke an uncanny intuition where cards were concerned. His mind, miraculously cool and clear as it always was in emergencies, was working with smooth, detached speed.

"Harris might pass under the gun," he reflected. "You can't figure Derringer would pass a second hand if he had anything good. Donnelly was next to last—he wouldn't pass anything above a pair, certainly. They're ganging up on us again as sure as hell, on nothing."

He looked at his cards calmly. Harris' eyes were on the table. Derringer was showing a wolfish joy in the game, his piercing eyes concentrating on Daly's face. Donnelly was sitting back in elaborate ease.

"You fellows are playing a lot of unfilled straights and four card flushes," he

said casually, "and I'll be damned if you draw against my little openers for nothing. Here goes my stack, if you want to draw!"

There was more than $3500 in the pot, and he thought the raise the correct strategy. There could be no more betting after the draw—all stacks would be exhausted, and it was table stakes.

Harris threw in his cards, as did Derringer and Tex. Daly tensed as Donnelly stayed.

"How many?" he asked.

There was no use of disguising his hand. Donnelly had passed, next to last man, and betting was over. Daly took three.

"Three myself. And I still have what I went in with—a pair of aces."

Daly silently laid down a pair of kings.

"You win, and a good hand at that," he said evenly.

He avoided meeting MacDowell's eyes. Donnelly had stood all that raising and re-raising, for big money, on a pair of aces. It was too uncanny to believe, almost, or else Donnelly was the poorest poker player alive. He couldn't have played more perfectly if he had known what Daly's hand was.

"And of course the cards aren't marked!" Daly thought fiercely as he said calmly:

"I think I'll take a five thousand dollar stack this time."

In three more hands signals would change. Did those men, by any possibility, know the signals between Tex and himself? They were using fingers to signal their hand—pair, two pairs, threes, straight, and so on, and voice inflections to indicate the value of the combinations.

The next three hands produced nothing sensational. The table was a pool of silence amid the drone of the room. The five men at the next table, before the door, were a bit more noisy than any one else.

Daly smelled a rat somewhere. That Donnelly play was unbelievable. After the signals changed, to eyes and a method of folding up cards after looking at them, he felt more confidence. Twice during the next few hands the three Verona gamblers bet fairly high against mediocre hands on the part of the airmen, but no signals could be detected.

Then there came a hand, with MacDowell dealing, on which Tex signaled three queens before the draw. Donnelly opened. Daly raised, on nothing, to help make a pot for Tex. Harris re-raised five hundred dollars. MacDowell hesitated, and finally just stayed.

"Up one thousand!" Donnelly announced, his eyes darting around the table.

Daly dropped, as did Harris, and MacDowell stayed. Donnelly drew two cards, and Tex the same number. MacDowell's eyes rose from his cards, and gazed long at the ceiling while he meditatively blew a smoke ring—two of them. He had caught a small pair for a queen full.

"Check," Donnelly snapped, and MacDowell bet a thousand dollars.

"Good," Donnelly said viciously, and threw his cards into the deck.

"Openers?" Daly said earnestly, and turned the hand.

Donnelly had thrown down three aces against a two card draw, on a not unusual sized bet for that game.

"That poker is too smart for me," Daly thought slowly, and he could fairly feel MacDowell's eyes burning into him. "These birds know our signals!"

He did the thing agreed upon between Tex and himself in case they should want to change them in an emergency. He borrowed a cigaret from the Southerner. Four hands after their change in signals the three Verona men tangled with them, and when the storm had blown over Tex and Daly had lost four thousand dollars between them, forcing two pairs—and they had lost to aces up in Harris' hand. Once again the poker was too uncanny.

"That was a ringtailed snorter," Daly remarked without emotion. "I'm going to stretch my legs and get a drink before the next hand. Deal me out if you want to."

"I think I'll imbibe one myself," drawled Tex. "Anybody else?"

"Oh, Slats, I want to see you a minute."

It was a short, stalwart man in puttees, breeches and an oilstained hat. Derringer went aside with him while the two flyers went downstairs to the bar. MacDowell was furious.

"They know our signals," Daly said shortly.

"Of course they do! That means that Henry Ivers told 'em. He got us into this—why, the son of a gun worked it so that we suggested it ourselves! It means—"

"May mean several things," Daly cut in incisively. "We can't stay away too long. We're ten thousand out between us."

"There must be a way to get these birds!" Tex interrupted savagely.

"We can try this, and quit when we're even if we feel like it. There might be a big pot, if we're in luck, before they get wise. Listen."

It took but a few seconds to explain. They were back at the table within two minutes, and Daly announced easily:

"Well, we've had a council of war and we decided we couldn't make money without money. How about eight thousand more apiece, Mr. Donnelly?"

"There speaks a man after my own heart!" Donnelly chuckled, his fat face beaming with artificial geniality. "Fifteen thousand each, and everything is hotsy totsy. How about the rest of us getting our stacks even, eh? I've got more than that myself. Dave, you're not up to that and neither are you, Slats."

All agreed while the Duke thought—

"All set for bigger killings."

WHILE the chips were being counted, another man entered and called Derringer aside for a talk. For a moment Derringer seemed to hesitate. Then—

"I'll play a few more hands, and then I'll be there," he said harshly.

Daly studied him curiously. That hawklike face was as rugged as a bleak cliff. Tall and thin and bony, there was a sort of natural ferocity, under iron control, obvious in him. He was playing with wolfish enjoyment in the game.

During the next three hands it became more obvious that the three were playing together, if more evidence was needed. When they were in a pot together, without either flyer in it, they played without interest and called the first small bet on good hands. They had no interest in winning.

On the fifth hand after the interruption Daly opened his cards warily. His face did not change in the slightest as he looked down at an ace full. The time had arrived.

He signaled Tex a pair of queens, using the first system of signals. The new set, which their three opponents could not possibly know, indicated his real hand. Tex signaled nothing, by both systems. The Verona men figured that one pair was all they had between them.

It was Harris' deal, and Derringer, luckily, opened. Tex raised him one hundred dollars.

"They'll figure we're off on a raise and re-raise thing or nothing, and will be out to get us," Daly assured himself. His heart was pounding. His eyes, though, had that film dropped across them, and his face never changed.

Donnelly just stayed, and Daly raised five hundred. Harris and Derringer came in.

"They're set to take our bluff!" Daly thought, and as he darted a look at MacDowell that towering gentleman was a picture of utter bliss.

He re-raised, and it went on, Daly and MacDowell doing all the reraising, until each man had put four thousand dollars into the pot. It was time to strike, and it was Harris who did it after a look at Donnelly.

"I've just been sitting around saying nothing on the best hand," he mumbled. "Now she really goes up for them that wants to draw. Here goes my stack!"

It wasn't quite his stack, but it was enough to exhaust the four thousand odd dollars which the flyers had in front of them.

"Good poker," Daly thought to himself. "That would stop us, if we had nothing."

Derringer stayed, MacDowell dropped regretfully, and Donnelly stayed, assuring the table that he was sorry he couldn't raise forever.

"Here's mine," Daly said quietly, and he could see their faces mirror utter amazement.

His hand won after the draw without competition. The highest hand between the three which was shown was Harris' openers—kings and threes—and they had staked twenty-four thousand dollars between them.

MacDowell lighted a cigaret and hummed a little tune. His eyes were pools of light. The pot had put the airmen more than ten thousand to the good, net.

Daly was tense, watching the taut players like a hawk. They were completely baffled. They must realize that their game was gone, probably, unless they just had better luck. They no longer knew the signals of their opponents. What would be the next move?

During the next two hands there was none. The table was silent as the grave, each man playing as though life itself was at stake. The stud players at the next table were growing noisier.

Donnelly, all traces of joviality gone now, shuffled the cards. He shoved them to Tex to cut.

"The hell I did!" shouted a man at the next table.

As Donnelly picked up the cut cards a huge, roughly dressed player rose to his feet.

"I'll cut your heart out!" he shouted, and table and chips crashed to the floor.

In a second there was a wild mêlée while the rest of the room watched. For just an instant Daly's eyes, like every one's else, was on the battle. Immediately, however, his mind was back on the game. He did not look around, but unless he was badly mistaken there was at least an even chance that Draw One Donnelly had switched decks in the excitement. He thought he had seen something from the corner of his eyes.

"Got a cold deck to use in emergencies!" Daly thought swiftly.

The battle was over in a moment. The men left amid the hoots of the onlookers.

"It was staged," Daly reflected.

He was on his feet, helping pick up chips. He caught MacDowell's eye, and the Texan came over to him.

"I think they switched decks," Daly said swiftly. "Play it. Maybe we can figure something, and if we can't I'll have Donnelly searched if we have to pull guns!"

After a moment of general excitement, the room was quiet again and they went back to the table.

"Just a bunch o' drunks," Donnelly said. "Well, here we go, boys. You cut them, MacDowell."

Complete quiet settled over the alcove. It was a world of its own. Daly had never looked at a poker hand with such burning interest as he did at these five subtly fresh feeling cards which he opened.

He was looking at three kings, a six and a seven. He was thinking:

"If it's a cold hand, they won't dare be too crude. The hands'll be completed on the draw."

He looked at Tex. The Southener was signaling a ten full. He had a pat hand. Instantly Daly's mind was made up. But which man was to beat them, and did he have his hand pat?

"Pass," he said briefly.

There was no surprise on the part of any one. He was first under the gun. Harris passed, as did Derringer.

"It wouldn't be Donnelly who'd beat us; it would be one of the others. He's dealing," Daly thought.

Tex opened for a hundred dollars. Donnelly studied his cards regretfully. He passed. One man out. Daly raised it five hundred dollars. Harris stayed, and Derringer dropped.

The thin little Jew, eyes on the table and hands playing ceaselessly with his cards, smoked his cigaret in nervous puffs. Never had Daly felt such mounting

excitement in a card game. The players were stooped over the table, and Derringer, especially, seemed as though he were drawn to the game by terrific magnetic attraction which would not let him leave although he should want to. The clatter of the crowded room, the noise from below, the drone of the swarming streets—all were forgotten by the young flyer as he mapped out his plan of campaign.

Tex MacDowell was right on the spot.

"Derringer's leaving, it's getting late, so let's make this pot a good one," he drawled, his voice vibrant. "Up a thousand."

"And two," Daly said unemotionally.

Harris' opaque black eyes darted toward Donnelly.

"I ain't backin' down," he said huskily. "And five, if that's the way you feel."

MacDowell studied his cards.

"I don't mind admitting I've got all I'm ever going to get," he said nonchalantly. "I'll just stay, I guess."

"Not me. The size of your stack, Harris," said the Duke.

Harris threw away his cigaret and lighted another in two lightning like movements.

"O.K."

Daly looked over at MacDowell. Did the Texan plumb his plan? Of course he would stay. He must—

He did.

The Duke pushed his chair back slightly. His eyes were on Donnelly. There were two possibilities in Harris' hand. One that he had an unbeatable pat hand, and had passed in the full knowledge that Tex would open. This seemed scarcely believable. There was no object in disguising his hand, and it would be suspicious for the second player to pass up a pat hand for a raise. It seemed more likely, in every way, that he had a hand he would have to fill.

"I was just taking a ride," Daly said easily, his eyes on Donnelly's pasty face.

With a quick movement he thrust his hand into the deck. He had not been the opener.

"Give me five cards."

Donnelly's mouth sagged open and his face seemed to go a greenish white. There was a grunt from Derringer, as though somebody had hurt him cruelly and he was trying to disguise his pain. Harris' eyes raised, and they glittered like a snake's. A sigh escaped him. It was as though the table was surrounded by images, each eye concentrated on the blond young man from whose sculptured face there looked forth those eyes of long experience and cold competence.

"Deal 'em, Donnelly," he said in low tones, and his right hand was at his side, where the Army holster swung.

Donnelly, for the moment, was not the experienced gambler. His hand shook. Without removing his eyes from Daly's he slowly dealt five cards.

"One," whispered Harris.

He scarcely bothered to look at it.

"Stand pat," stated Tex. "On a ten full."

Daly looked at his cards. The blood was running hot through his veins. The next move he knew not, but across the table was the man who, from all the world, he would have picked to be by his side in an emergency like this.

His first two cards were the fourth king and nine of hearts. Then there was the ace of hearts. He knew he had won. Had he drawn but one card to his threes, he would have filled, and the nine of hearts would have filled the bottom of Harris' open end straight flush. If he drew two, Harris would have got the ace of hearts, which would also have filled his hand.

"Take all the money," Harris said, as though baffled.

The table was looking at Daly as though he were some freak of nature. Their knowledge of the plot showed plainly—they did not notice Tex. As that gentleman scooped in the money—fifteen thousand dollars of it from their enemies—Daly's eyes roved to Derringer's. There was what amounted to chilly admiration there.

But not in Donnelly's. It seemed that

there was murder in those murky depths, so Daly wasted no time. He pushed back his chair a little more.

"Donnelly, and the rest of you—you know we're wise," he said very slowly and coolly. "No monkey business from now on. This game is over here and now. You've been outcrooked. I saw you switch decks. Now listen."

He leaned forward, and his hand, unobtrusively, was on the butt of his gun. Silence was like a wet fog over the table.

"Cash in our chips now, and in cash. You don't dare monkey with us. There are a lot of people on the outside—and outside of Verona—who know what we're here to do. If you make one false move, your gambling dump is going on the fritz right tonight. I'll tell everybody in the place about it, and have it out of business tomorrow. If there's anything more ugly than just cheating, you and your place and your friends are going to be blown to hell tomorrow. Get that? Now you call somebody and you get us our money *pronto* or you'll be searched for proof within one minute publicly, and worse than that will happen in twenty-four hours.

"I'm not getting tough. I'm telling you, before you tell me something."

"I'm leaving. I have no idea what this is all about." It was Derringer's harsh voice. "I'll settle tomorrow," he went on gruffly, and walked out of the alcove as though leaving something very unpleasant behind him.

For a long moment Donnelly sat there. The Duke felt that he could watch his mind, like a rat in a trap, doubling and redoubling, trying to find a way out. Then, so suddenly that it was a shock, the fleshy gambler relaxed, and that false smile spread over his face.

"You won, and won right, and you get your money," he said with his grin widening. There was no trace of shame on his face.

Daly scarcely knew why, but he had a feeling that Donnelly felt that it was a loan.

A MOMENT later he and Tex were leaning against the alcove, close together. They had allowed Donnelly to go down after the money, finally. The Duke was certain that it would be forthcoming.

"Duke, my hand," Tex whispered as they supposedly watched the room. "Did we rook 'em? And how! Say, Derringer hasn't left yet. What are we going to do with the dough?"

"Inasmuch as it's a dead cinch that Henry Ivers is as crooked as a corkscrew," Daly said evenly, his eyes on the tall oil man who was conversing earnestly in a corner.

"I can't believe it," Tex said slowly. "Somebody may have been listening in in that warehouse when we were talking to Henry."

"He'd have been in the room behind the office then, and how'd he get there without Ivers knowing about it?"

MacDowell's tanned face was suddenly set in grim lines.

"Boy, how he worked it!" he said. "Didn't suggest it himself—but we fell for his trap! Doublecrossing dad, eh, and getting us down here to lose twenty thousand or so besides all that he and Derringer are rooking the old man out of in other ways," he ruminated, slow venom in his voice. "If it's true, and it sure looks it, what a frame up it is! Maybe, to give the old boy credit, this Slats Derringer has something on him and forced him to cooperate. Hank and Dad buy acreage on a gamble, and then Ivers plays Derringer's hand and lets or helps Derringer tie it up now that it's valuable. They take no chance if it wasn't—and take no chance of losing the acreage now that it's valuable. Why, that old skinflint is probably embezzling from the business, too—shooting machinery to Derringer, giving him all the breaks, fooling with the books—everything! And to cap it off, he gets us down here to lose thousands more of the old man's good dough—"

"It strikes me that we'd better fly that money out of this town *pronto!*" Daly said quietly. Now, the excitement of the

battle he had loved gone, he was as aloof as though discussing the spending of ten dollars. "I wonder about Ivers' guards for the ship."

"Here comes Donnelly—with the *dinero*," Tex whispered.

The gambler had in his hands a small bag.

"Come back here," he told them, and took them into a small room. The watchful flyers had counted out for them winnings of more than twenty-five thousand dollars.

"We'd better buy the bag," grinned MacDowell. "How much, Donnelly?"

"Take it with my compliments," Donnelly smiled back. It was a mere widening of the lips.

"So long, many thanks—and don't have us fooled with," Tex warned him. "We've got a visit to make, and it isn't far from here. Until we get there, our hands won't stray far from these Colts—"

"Good God, Duke! Donnelly! Want to get out? What the hell is coming off?"

Daly leaped to the door beside the amazed MacDowell. A stream of men were erupting from the stairway, and at their head was Jed Conklin. The faded eyes of the leathery, irascible little Texan were alight with an almost fanatical glow. Behind him heavily armed men were disposing themselves around the wall of the big room.

"Don't nobody be scared—you know me—but don't make no wrong moves neither!"

The dozens of gamblers sat as though petrified. There was no fear in their faces—rather a dazed interest in the proceedings. Donnelly brushed by the flyers and stood in front of the door. Over across the room Slats Derringer was motionless as a statue. Daly, his level eyes sweeping the room, felt that the lantern jawed oil operator loomed like a giant even in that crowd.

Conklin was like a small gamecock, with his sombrero on the back of his head and his small body fairly quivering with nervous eagerness.

"Listen, all o' you!" he proclaimed. "I'm here to get Slats Derringer out o' the way for tomorrow, and then return 'im. I'm electioneerin', if you want t' put it that way, and I'm speakin' my piece all around town and doin' other things in the bargain."

He caught sight of Donnelly, and bowed mockingly.

"Evenin', Draw One," he said with elaborate sarcasm. "You're due for a little vacation from these parts. Slats, don't you make a move or I'll have you hogtied in three seconds less'n nothin'. I've got about three hundred o' yore plug uglies where they won't do no harm fur a day or so, and don't forgit that."

"Let's get out of his sight," Daly whispered, "and hear what's going on."

It was like a dream, those armed men around the walls. Evidently Conklin had taken the downstairs part of the house without a struggle. The stairs were packed with curious gamblers from the lower floor, and from without the noise of the mob was growing louder.

"Now git this, everybody," Conklin went on, pacing up and down in the center of the room. "None of you care much about who runs this here town, one way or the other. You all know that Slats Derringer's been runnin' it, havin' more men, more acreage, and more *dinero* that he's stole than anybody else. He's even hired the only airplane so nobody else can use it in a pinch. Yuh don't want no Sunday School around here—you want fun. Now I'm tellin' why, tomorrow everybody's gonna git an even break; why my men are gonna be policin' this town, and some other things. I'm willin' t' step aside fur any man except Slats or one of his flunkeys. And I'm fightin' him with his own methods. He's gonna be out o' this town, with all his crooks, until we git things set to handle him right and proper the first trick he pulls like the ones he's been pullin'.

"Y' want t' gamble, don't you? Do y' know that Slats owns most o' the principal places in this town now, and that every one of 'em is crooked? Yeah, Slats, I'm callin' you a card crook t' yore face!

Do you boys know that that crap game downstairs ain't right? Do you know that the dance hall gals in Pete's place roll you after you git poison? How many of you had yore tools stole, yore trucks highjacked, and yore acreage rooked away from you by Slats Derringer because there wasn't nobody strong enough to stop him? He's got me about ruined, but it ain't gonna keep up. And I know that tomorrow he had it fixed t' be legal high mucky muck o' this town, and that it'd be run from soup to nuts as he wanted it run—meanin' that he'd have a finger on every crooked dollar he could make and that everybody'd take a back seat for him on anything from machinery t' food!

"Know what I'm gonna do? Gonna do if I swing for it? I'm gonna have every damn' man o' his herded out o' town for the day tomorrow. I'm gonna see whether you'll vote fur me if you git a chance to vote without a gun in yore back. And then I'm gonna run this town as it oughta be run—a square deal fur everybody. Yore liquor won't be poison—any dump that serves it'll be smashed up. Yore gamblin' houses'll be straight. And murder and robbery's gonna be punished so fast that the execution'll take place before Laredo'd have the man in jail.

"Git ready, Slats. I've got the dope on you, just from what you done t' me. You're gonna go along with me right now. I'm givin' this town a physic t' clean it out. Y' don't want martial law, like there was in Mexia here, do you, boys? Y' don't want Rangers runnin' the town, do you? I even went so far as t' warn them Border Patrolmen t' keep hands off—leastways until they knowed—"

Daly tensed as the sound of a fusillade of shots came from the street. Suddenly there was a great deal of shouting. In a moment the noises of a mighty battle came washing against the building.

For a moment Conklin seemed thunderstruck. Suddenly Derringer was on his feet.

"We'll see how much you can get away with!" he shouted. "I'll cram every one o' your insults down your throat, Jed Conklin. Got my men, have you? That's them, outside!"

"Come on, boys!" Conklin yelled. "Out o' the way on them stairs!"

IN AN instant the Conklin forces which had accompanied him were plunging down the steps. There was unmistakable evidence from without that the struggle was a gargantuan one. It seemed that the whole main street must be engaged. Shouts, curses, occasional shots, breaking glass and all the din of a rough and tumble battle were plainly audible.

MacDowell's eyes were alight with glee.

"Conklin and Derringer are going to fight it out right now!" he breathed. "Say, Duke, Ivers must have tipped off Derringer."

"Sure. What do we do now?" the Duke asked absently. "Tex, there isn't a thing we can do. Our job is to save this *dinero* right now—and talk to Ivers. What our job is a little later I don't know. What may be going on with this town as a center may interest the Government very much. Let's see this window. It'll be as much as our life is worth to go out the front door."

The tiny window was about fifteen feet off the ground.

"I'll go down on our belts, and you can drop and I'll catch you," Tex suggested, and in a minute, their two belts tied together and dangling from the sill, he was going down. He dropped to the ground. Daly released the belts, and then dropped into the Texan's arms.

"Listen to that!" Daly said, with what was almost awe in his voice.

The street battle was an epic. Guns were not in use, now, but the thoroughfare was a solid mass of heaving bodies. Everybody had joined in, it seemed. It was a battle royal, and Verona was a madhouse. Some dives were being looted, it seemed, as a sideline to the fight for supremacy.

"Derringer either didn't take Ivers'

warnings seriously, or else Conklin struck too unexpectedly," Daly surmised. "Slats wanted to leave the game, but couldn't, it seemed to me. He must have thought he had everything arranged. I guess Conklin's got some of his leading henchmen out of the way, but Derringer has enough organized opposition left to make it interesting."

As they stole around the corner of the Ivers storehouse, they got a good view of the main street. It was almost an organized battle now. One solid mass of men was being driven back, but Daly could not tell whether they composed the forces of Conklin or Derringer. The fighting was terrific, and stunned men were being trampled in the surge and flow of the struggle.

They got in the back door, and two or three watchmen were satisfied to let them make their way through the merchandise after they had explained their errand. The front of the store was deserted.

"I wonder whether Ivers is out watching—no, he wouldn't be," Texas said as they mounted the stairs.

THE UPPER floor was practically dark. Somewhere in the rear one light was burning.

"His office is lighted," Daly remarked. "I—"

"Throw up your hands!"

From behind four different masses of material there came four men. All had guns and all were masked. They advanced toward the flyers, the leader's eyes sparkling through the slits in the mask. Where had Daly seen those eyes before?

"Here, what's this?"

Ivers was at the door of his office.

"Stay where you are!" barked somebody, and a man detached himself from his comrades and covered the storekeeper.

"Every one of these fellows is a Mexican!" Daly told himself unbelievingly. "And Ivers, damn him, is in on it! Trying to pretend these men could be hiding outside his office door without him knowing it!"

"What saps we are!" Tex was groaning as the men got to them.

Daly was flaying himself, also. They should have buried the money back of the gambling place. No, the hiding place would have been tortured out of them, if necessary.

"I presume this is what you want," he said coolly, thrusting the bag forward.

The leader bowed mockingly. He was tall and slender. Why was he so familiar?

"You are right," he agreed. "We also want Lieutenant MacDowell."

"What?"

It was an exclamation of utter astonishment from the Texan.

"What the hell do you mean?" Ivers fairly shrieked in his wheezy voice.

"We shall take Lieutenant MacDowell across the river, and it will cost his father fifty thousand dollars to get him back."

The leader spoke those words as if enjoying them. Behind the mask his peculiar eyes were aglow with a curious catlike light. Suddenly Daly's mind, like ice now, found the solution of the familiarity. He was the man from whom they had asked directions, that afternoon—the blond hair and the oriental eyes. It could be no one else. And he had known Ivers, from what he had said.

"The directions shall be given now. We will go into the office, to avoid observation."

The stilted English, spoken with just the trace of an accent, was the final identification of the mocking outlaw, as far as the Duke was concerned. Helpless before six ready guns, Ivers and the two flyers were marched into the office. Right outside the window were hundreds of people, Daly reflected. On the ground floor were watchmen. That battle outside was interspersed with shots now.

"Listen, Daly."

The leader was businesslike now. His masked cohorts disposed themselves in a circle. At least three of them were Mexican.

"Tomorrow, or at latest the next day, you will fly, with the money, down the river between Laredo and McMullen.

You will find, on the Mexican side of the river, a field with a white cross in it. You will land there. If there are other ships in the air, all will be lost. If you have guns on your ship, all will be lost. You will land. If all is correct, a man will meet you, and you will be directed where to fly to give over the money and to return Lieutenant MacDowell to his father. If nothing happens, surely you would not expect us to let him go free?"

He waited a moment for reply. He was enjoying himself to the hilt, the outwardly composed but inwardly boiling Daly could see. Tex was a streak of flame. He was half crouched, ready to spring on all those guns at once.

"Now," the leader went on with relish, "we shall proceed. Bind Mr. Ivers and Mr. Daly, *caballeros*. I know that Mr. Ivers and Mr. MacDowell, senior, are partners. There will be no excuse for lack of money."

For a second Daly considered showing his hand. The next instant he discarded the idea. Doubtless he and Tex would be deader than doornails the second he denounced Ivers. As he stood quietly, allowing his hands to be bound behind his back and his ankles to be strapped, he thought things through. If Ivers was a secret ally of Derringer, he was doubtlessly in league with these bandits. A kidnaping of Tex—he would be justified, from the world's point of view, in putting up the money without even consulting the elder MacDowell. The very next day, as a matter of fact.

"Our little trip down here was figured to put about sixty thousand dollars of Tex's father's money into the pockets of Ivers and Derringer!" Daly reflected.

Suddenly the fat, flabby, basilisk eyed Ivers became a monster to him. Never had he felt so utterly repelled by a personality as he was by the man who had suddenly become like an unclean animal. Double crossing his dearest friend, unhesitatingly committing him to mental anguish and enriching himself, like a ghoul . . .

"*Buenas noches!*"

The bandit leader was standing in the doorway, looking down at the two bound and gagged men. Daly was lying three or four feet from Ivers.

"I'll be all right, Duke," Tex said, his voice choked with fury.

The outlaw put out the light, and Daly could hear the door lock click.

WITHOUT a second's delay Daly writhed across the floor toward Ivers. With his back to the merchant, he felt with his fettered hands for the hands of his enemy. The bonds on Ivers were very loose. Tex was in no special danger, he reflected. However, something always to be figured was part of the temperament of the Texan. He would seize the slightest excuse for making a break. The getaway to the Border must be all arranged for, of course. And men who would dare, under no matter what protection, to kidnap an Army officer would certainly take no chances. Nor would they hesitate to shoot, and shoot to kill, if necessary. Above all, the situation at Verona demanded cleaning up. From Ivers and Derringer and Donnelly and those men, on whom there was no absolutely ironclad evidence which would hold in court, he could expect no confession. In that bandit gang, however, there would be men who would talk.

Ivers' hands were free. His bonds had been a joke. He untied his ankles, and the Duke heard him get to his feet. The next moment the light was on again, and the fat storekeeper was untying Daly.

"This is a hell of a note," he was saying, his full moon face woebegone. "Bill'll never forgive me for this."

As Daly got to his feet he was wondering for the dozenth time whether the gamblers had gotten word to Ivers that the flyers had known that their signals had been given away. He decided that the chances of that were slim. They could not be sure, anyhow.

Nothing could be gained, and everything lost, possibly, by giving away his

hand right then. Ivers might realize, from the result of the game, that his share in the plot was known. For a second Daly hesitated. Outside the noise had died away somewhat. The battle seemed to have shifted down the street. There were shots from a distance now.

Daly lifted the telephone. First he'd get the Laredo flight in action. The bandits were riding, doubtless, and they had fifteen miles to go. They could be cut off at the river.

"No use of that," Ivers wheezed. "Somebody—Jed Conklin, I guess—cut the lines between here and Laredo."

The silent Daly speedily verified that information.

"So long," he said evenly. "I'm going."

"Wait a minute!" Ivers said in alarm. "What are you going to—"

"Get after Tex, of course."

Daly was standing at the door, seemingly utterly composed.

"You can't do that! They'd kill Tex perhaps. What can you do to interfere?"

"I can fly after 'em."

Daly's shadowed eyes were on the heavy jowled face, and perhaps something in them gave his thoughts away. If final proof were needed of Ivers' participation in the scheme, he had it then.

"I won't let you do it, for the sake of Tex and Bill," Ivers told him, and a new note had crept into his voice.

His hand, apparently casually, strayed toward a desk drawer. In a split second Daly's mind was made up. Time was precious, but Ivers had an excuse to hold him there. He could pretend it was for the best interests of MacDowell.

Daly's gun was out in a second.

"The hell you will," he said icily. "Ivers, I'm going and going now. I'll tie you up so you can't interfere, on any pretext whatever. Don't move."

Inwardly he was thinking:

"If my ship was already out of commission he'd let me go out there. Those guards of his weren't instructed to monkey with it unless it was necessary."

For a few seconds Ivers sat there, like a huge Buddha. He seemed eyeless, and there was a sudden effect of utter coldness in him. It was as though the flesh were petrified, but the spirit within radiating vitality.

"Before you make a move, Daly," he said slowly, his lips barely moving, "I'm telling you you'd better not. You've got the drop on me, but you'd better not."

"He's thoroughly scared at the idea of me getting into the air," Daly thought with controlled exultation.

"Why not?" he asked aloud.

"I'll go to any lengths, for MacDowell's sake, to keep you from interfering. Even to the extent of telling you that if you do this crazy thing there'll be a certain young man arrested immediately for the murder of one Jim Fitzpatrick, within a few miles of this place, several years ago."

Something seemed to snap inside Daly. He knew that what he had been dreading, subconsciously, all along had happened. He could see the headlines now: "Government Agent Accused of Murder in Border Barroom."

AS HE stood there in the barren office, with the noise of Verona washing up through the windows, there were a few seconds in which he saw the structure he had built for himself crashing around him. The past would be spread for the country to read. Professional gambler, murderer—now a Government agent. Disgraced, he would drop out of the niche he had worked so hard to carve for himself. That the murder had been self-defense would make no difference.

He had nothing to fear from the law, except exposure. He faced the fact that he would be an outcast, a branded crook. And the hateful, terrible days when he had been forced to live a life he loathed with people whom he despised, would come back. The height to which he had lifted himself by his bootstraps through ten years of effort would be lost in one plunge.

As he raised his eyes to those lines of light in Ivers' face there was something in them which made Ivers say hastily:

"And I'm not the only one that knows it, either. It won't do you any good to put me out of the way."

As so frequently happened when he faced a crisis, Daly's mind seemed abnormally keen. Despite the fact that his heart was lead within him, his brain seemed to work automatically. With a sort of frozen clarity he had decided that a few minutes of time, one way or the other, meant little. He could catch the bandits in Mexico, if necessary, and let international law have its way with him after MacDowell was safe.

"Listen, Ivers," he said coolly, his eyes looking into tragic depths rather than at the man before him, "you can do as you please about raking up the past. If you know as much as you do, you know that Jim Fitzpatrick was a white eyed rat of a killer, who got by because his father at that time was the smuggling king of the Border who pulled wires that even led to Washington at times. And you know that the drunken louse shot a poor old coon who didn't get him a sandwich fast enough, and that I shot him when he turned on me because I told him what he was. Go ahead and talk, damn you, and you'll have plenty of chance to! You may let the country know what I was when I was a kid, but, by God, they'll know you were a doublecrossing crook yourself!"

Ivers did not even blink his eyes. Tension was like a physical thickness in the air.

"What do you mean?" he asked huskily.

"That you're in with Derringer, that you're doublecrossing Mr. MacDowell, that you tipped off our signals in this game tonight and got us here to lose money, and that this abduction of Tex is a frameup to get you and your pals another fifty thousand! God, what a rat you are! I don't know what you've got against the MacDowells, but you'll have a chance to tell."

"You're crazy, Daly. And it won't get you anything. Assuming for the sake of argument that you were right, what proof would you have? And wouldn't you be crazy to—"

"To what?"

Ivers eyed the ready gun and played with his watch chain. He looked around to make sure that they were alone.

"Maybe," he said slowly, "we can make a deal."

Daly knew in an instant that he could trade silence for silence. His own past would remain a secret, if he remained silent on the subject of Henry Ivers. Then, with the force of a stunning physical blow, the implication in Ivers' words made his eyes widen and his body feel numb. Ivers must realize that Tex knew as much as Daly himself.

Ivers did not expect that Tex would be able to tell any tales whatever!

The paralyzed flyer fought for control. Now that he thought of it, it seemed probable. Already the gang had proved themselves totally without scruples of any kind. The kidnaping of an Army officer was a serious business which would result, for the definitely known bandits, in an unending hunt. It would be a matter of international law. They had been masked. Tex would know what they looked like. What amount of money would cause them to take a chance on such a crime, if they were not almost guaranteed safety after it was over? What more likely than that they collect the money, and kill MacDowell anyway? Tex had been a Border Patrolman for five years, and dozens of outlaws feared, dreaded and hated him. He alone, almost single handed, had put Dave Fitzpatrick behind the bars, and Dave had had a legion of followers. Ivers himself must hate the elder MacDowell. Vengeance and money combined—why, those very bandits in whose charge he was might be made up of men with a grudge against the officer of the law.

In an instant Daly made up his mind. Everything in the world was forgotten now except that the life of his friend was in danger. From that second on no thought of his own personal safety entered into his calculations in the slightest.

"Just what do you mean?" he asked quietly.

"Just that you do nothing, nothing at all, and say nothing, now or later. I agree to do likewise. We're alone. We can talk freely."

"Suppose I should tell you that Tex knows as much as I do?"

Ivers' face did not change.

"MacDowell will not bother us."

It was said as coolly as if he were speaking of a business deal. Daly lounged against the desk.

"I can't afford to have my life ruined by this business," he said calmly. "Pretty slick layout, worth a couple of hundred thousand dollars to you and Derringer, eh? Say, you must hate old man MacDowell."

Ivers' eyes were on his desk.

"Fifteen years ago," he almost whispered, "I swore I'd get him some day."

"What was the matter, and why doesn't he know it? I should think—"

It seemed that Ivers took warning. His eye lids raised suddenly.

"None of your business. And remember this: You can be shot and shot quickly as the identified murderer who tried to escape. Every excuse will be ours. You're having a favor done you when we offer to let you go."

Daly moved like a striking rattlesnake. His gun came down on the head of that mound of unclean flesh, and Ivers slumped, unconscious. The Duke had learned all he could. And he had no doubt that neither he nor Tex would live to tell the tale if Ivers had his way. He had swapped his own knowledge to get at Ivers' plans, and it behooved him to get out of Verona without delay. His plans were complete.

IN A TRICE he had bound the unconscious man securely. He must take a chance on getting a start of a few minutes. He was not thinking of his personal safety. He was thinking of MacDowell.

He could climb the partition between the office and the storeroom outside. The bandit had already locked the door, as a gesture to protect Ivers. Possibly no one would enter during the night. Derringer and his men were busy.

He turned out the light, after taking a gun out of the desk drawer, and scaled the partition with the aid of a chair. He walked out boldly, using the back way. He found a horse tethered to the rear of the building. That was lucky, saved him from borrowing or stealing one on the main street. A horse would make better time than a car.

Circling the town only lost him a little time. He did not even see the main street, but he got the impression that a veritable mob of milling men were in excited conclave along its entire length. Riding like the wind, he sped through the mesquite toward the field. He covered the two miles in a few minutes, and by that time his plan of action was settled in his mind.

He rode toward the field behind the barrier of the canvas hangar and left his horse there. Undoubtedly those guards had been carefully instructed. Ivers must have figured on the possibility of the ship's being used should Daly by any chance get free. They would have orders to keep him out of the air by some method or other.

He ran through the mesquite toward the hangar. The noise of drills, working within a quarter of a mile of the field, drowned out any sound he might make. He got to the back of the canvas hangar, which seemed to have one light in it. As he crept around to the corner, the De Haviland came into view.

Four men were sitting around it, plainly visible in the moonlight.

"A couple of 'em must be flyers," Daly thought.

They were not more than fifty feet from the front of the hangar, if that.

"Thank God I brought the other gun," he thought as he got it out.

Both guns cocked and ready, he broke into a run.

"Put up your hands!" he shouted, "Don't make another move!"

The surprise was complete. He looked

down into the amazed faces of the two guards, and of the men who must be, from their clothing, the flyers. One, to his surprise, was a young Mexican with a pock marked face. The other was the most furtive eyed man he had ever seen. Middle aged and very small, he seemed to be totally unable to look at Daly in any other manner than quick, frightened glances. Probably he was the mechanic.

As Daly was about to speak he suddenly stiffened. From afar his ears caught the sound of thudding hoofbeats. Two horses. Some one was riding, and riding fast, toward the field. Had Ivers been discovered by his friends?

"You may be on the level, all of you," he said tersely, "but I take no chances. Drop your guns, you guards, and then the four of you run like hell for the other end of this field! Fast!"

For a second they hesitated. He shot, slightly to one side of the mechanic.

"I meant it," he said coolly. "And you flyers—don't get into the air or I'll shoot you down without asking any questions!"

The Mexican pilot dropped a blistering curse and started to run. He was unarmed. The others, their eyes darting toward the horsemen who were now in sight, five hundred yards away, did likewise.

The ship was all right, Daly thought, as he vaulted into the rear cockpit. The Liberty, luckily, had a self-starter and he leaned over the partitions between the cockpits to start it. On the second try it caught. There were shots from the horsemen—his last doubt as to their mission was swept away.

WITHOUT fastening his belt he gave the cold Liberty the gun. He wiggled the controls very slightly as the big bomber rushed across the field. Elevators and ailerons moved obediently.

Close to the black wall of mesquite on the other end of the field he pulled back on the stick, and the DH answered. It took the smooth night air cleanly, despite the sputtering motor. He circled the field as he unwound the radio antenna. That radio key was his reason for being in the back seat. The roar of the motor grew smoother as the Liberty warmed. It had been a desperate chance, taking off with it stone cold, but he had won.

He glanced down at the field. The four men were back in front of the hangar, talking to the two horsemen. What could be more probable than that that ship, said by Conklin to be subsidized by Derringer, should be used for illegal purposes at times? There might even be machine guns available to mount on the rear seat. It had a scarf mount, he remembered.

As he methodically unwound the antenna his whole being was concentrated on but one thing, the saving of Tex. Nevertheless there seemed to be a part of his brain which automatically worked along, steadily putting the various elements in the situation in their proper places. The abduction of MacDowell had been a stroke of genuis—an excellent excuse for Ivers to put $50,000 of the elder MacDowell's money in his pocket without so much as consulting with the old man. Probably Ivers had not figured on killing Tex until he had found out how much the two flyers knew. During the entire time the merchant had banked more or less on the full cooperation of Daly in an emergency, through the power of blackmail. The motive behind his machinations had been partly revenge for something which had happened in the past, and partly the opportunity to make a great deal of money. Between embezzling funds from the business, dealing in acreage, poker and the kidnaping, thrusting the blame for all losses on conditions at Verona, a quarter of a million dollars seemed a small estimate of the sure money Ivers could make in his position of trust.

The antenna was out, now, and the metal fish at the end of it gleamed in the moonlight. As Daly's hand found the key he pointed the De Haviland for the river. His hand rested motionless on the sending instrument for a moment, how-

ever, as his eyes swept the shadowed earth. For Verona, a white city under the moon, seemed to be burning up. There were three fires on the main street, and in the light of the flames the swarming mobs were like frightened ants scurrying around a ruined ant hill.

"In wrecking the joints they started some fires," Daly thought.

The field itself was a sight to strike the observer with awe. Derrick lights winked and boiler mouths shone red, and on the derrick floors men were toiling. Vehicles crawled over the roads with gleaming eyes as the work of the field went on.

It was all part of the nightmare to Daly. His only hope was a negative one —to save MacDowell. For himself, there was none. Once again his life, built on a rotten foundation, was about to crumble. That mask of a face was drawn as he bent over his key, and his eyes were like windows showing the suffering within.

He concentrated fiercely on his work. He could not hear his own signals, of course, above the bellow of the Liberty as he sent out the Laredo call a dozen times. Then he went to work, sending his message slowly as the DH roared along, a thousand feet high, toward the river.

> Daly. In air above Verona. MacDowell kidnaped by bandits one hour ago. Must be near river. Send two ships down river to help me. Send others to Verona. Situation very bad. Get Henry Ivers, Derringer and Conklin. Notify Rangers, sheriff and so forth.

He could waste no more time on sending. They would have the message; the radio shack was open night and day. He looked down. He was over Mexico, the Rio Grande a mile north of him.

As he banked around he made quick calculations while his eyes swept the sky for signs of an airplane. That civilian plane might not heed his warning. If it had guns it might be sent out to get him. That would leave matters in excellent shape for Ivers and Derringer—and a burned ship and a few bones tell no tales of murder.

The bandits probably had not ridden very fast. Fifteen miles, and only an hour had passed. They should be near the river.

They were! At least, there was a group of horsemen, riding like mad, two miles east of the little settlements on the river bank.

"They aren't feeling as good as their captive right now," Daly thought grimly. "Now what shall I do? With Tex in the middle of 'em I can't shoot so well."

HE WAS circling over them. They were a mile from the river, riding through the mesquite. There was a strip of clearings, a half mile wide, along the northern bank of the Rio Grande. They'd have to come out in the open soon.

He turned south, a mile back of them and fifteen hundred feet high. He took a quick look at his instruments. All was well on those gages, from oil pressure to battery charging rate. The twelve cylinder Liberty was bellowing along evenly, and he tried the switches absently as he strove to form a plan. He could just follow them, spotting their location, but a couple of sparkplugs, fouled with oil, would mean the ruin of all his plans. He dared not trust MacDowell's life to that motor.

A man of one idea, he was so utterly engrossed in his thoughts that when the windshield shattered before his eyes he looked at it, for the moment, in dull wonder.

Then his head snapped around, and he sent the De Haviland into a dizzy vertical bank which seemed to almost break it in two. Behind him, four hundred feet higher than he, was the civilian ship. In the back seat a man was standing, handling a machine gun which was mounted there. That ship had taken off, sneaked north, probably, to gain altitude, got higher than he was, and swooped down out of the night sky.

And he was still in the back seat. His gun control was in the front cockpit. He cursed with cold venom as he twisted

his ship once more. Only blind luck had saved him from being shot down. His wings had holes in them.

He saw his chance. The other ship was banking to give the back seat man a chance to shoot. In an instant the Duke's belt was off, and he had plunged head first into the front cockpit. As the DH faltered in a stall he grabbed the stick. He got to the seat, and as he strapped the belt he sent the bomber curving madly through the air.

He had one advantage—front guns to aim with the ship. They had altitude, but they had to present a broadside view to give the machine gunner a chance. He was a big man.

"By God, I believe it's Henry Ivers!" the Duke told himself slowly. "Going to get to Mexico if he doesn't shoot me down, eh?"

The two ships circled, their motors fairly shaking the earth as they roared along at full speed. The Duke was very quiet and very calm now. He watched like a hawk. He must spoil their shots, waiting his chance.

Spots of fire came from the gun above. He went into a dive, twisting as he dived, at right angles to their course. The cruiser banked to keep him in range. They figured on getting him as he passed underneath them.

In a split second he changed his dive, banking steeply to the left. Their course was to the right. The DH was quivering with the terrific speed of that full power dive, and the Liberty's roar rose to a mad bellow as the tachometer showed eighteen hundred and fifty revolutions a minute and the airspeed hovered around two hundred and fifteen.

He glanced around. They were banking to the left. In a moment the guns would be on him, but for a small interval of time the ships would be too far apart for accurate shooting.

There he shot the dice with destruction. Without hesitation he lifted the frail De Haviland upward in a clean arc. Up and up it went with that excess speed. Every second he expected to feel a bullet.

It started over on its back, five hundred feet higher than it had been before. With rudder and stick, plus the feel of the ship which had made him a great pilot, he turned the DH on its horizontal axis, in a half roll.

Hanging upside down, then sideward as the ship answered, there came a second when there loomed before his sights the bulk of the other ship. It had twisted again, reversing its course. As his DH turned his hand was pressed down on the gun control, and his front guns were spraying lead.

How he did it he did not know, but even as the DH was turning he kept its nose pointed at the other ship. Then the cruiser passed out of range.

Right side up, stalled, he looked about for it. He was as high as they were now. He was higher!

They were below him and seemed in trouble. The cruiser turned loggily.

"To hell with you," he said to himself with icy calmness, and dived on them.

He saw his tracers travel almost the length of the ship, and then he scarcely watched it as it spun earthward. He was already on his way toward those galloping horsemen, who were just entering the open, when the cruiser hurtled to the ground and a great ball of fire lit up the earth for miles around.

Would the bandits give up now? He wondered. Probably not. They could not know that Ivers himself had been in that ship, largely for the purpose of making a clean getaway. They had figured on getting Daly with those first shots.

"And they nearly did!" he thought.

Suddenly he felt hope bounding in his heart. He was a half mile to one side of the bunched riders. He sent the DH downward in a fast dive, pointed at them. The motor sputtered. Had some bullet taken effect in it? God, he must hurry. That roar didn't sound right. Sort of uneven.

Now he was close to them, flying at two miles and a half a minute, only five feet off the ground.

What he had thought might happen did. Those frightened horses were now a group of crazed bucking broncos, out of control, as the ship flashed toward them. One rider was on the ground. The rest of them to a man were fighting their horses.

And as Daly zoomed up over them he saw Tex MacDowell, with the skill born of his ranch boyhood, guide his maddened pony northward like a frightened rabbit.

He had a hundred yard start—no more than that. Suddenly Daly was aware of the fact that the DH was stalling. He pushed forward on the stick as the motor sputtered and died. It always died, momentarily, in an extreme stall.

But as he got the ship into a dive to regain flying speed it did not catch again. The next second blue flame was playing over the motor. The gas line had broken, flooding the hot Liberty. A bullet had weakened it, doubtlessly; but he was afire, six hundred feet in the air.

Somehow it seemed unimportant. He got the ship into a sideslip as a wave of heat blistered him. His right wing, which was pointed upward in the slip, was already being eaten by flames. For the moment he was not too uncomfortable as the flames blew upward and away from him. His eyes were on the ground. He had to hold his goggles to keep the terrific airstream, coming upward at him as a result of the slip, from tearing them off.

THERE was Tex, going like mad for the mesquite. One lone rider was after him, and gaining. The others were huddled near the river, apparently unwilling to separate themselves from their nearness to Mexico and safety.

If there was left in Duke Daly any trace of selfishness or fear or dross of any kind, it was burned away during that moment when he hung beneath a tranquil night sky in his flaming De Haviland. The second he pointed its nose down the draft would blow the fire back on him, and the fuselage would turn into a flaming coffin. By sideslipping to the ground, he had a chance for life. Down below, the man whose place could never be taken in the life of Duke Daly was fleeing for his life, and losing.

The DH was three hundred feet high, losing altitude steadily. There was a curious look in Daly's eyes as he took a deep breath of the last pure air he would ever breathe. Pain was gone from them and shadows had lifted, and it was as if he were seeing visions as he brought the ship's nose down and started the last dive.

In a split second his eyes were burning and his clothes charring. Heat rolled over him in a sickening wave. His bleary eyes never wavered, however, and pain was non-existent. He did not breathe. He would not fill his lungs with smoke and fire yet.

He had his bead. Dazed, his head reeling, he sent a hail of death down on the pursuing bandit, and not until the bandit had toppled from his horse did Daly's hand leave the gun control.

Fifty feet from the ground. Now his body was a torturing shell. He was groaning as he lifted the ship in a sideslip. He gulped in air as he rammed the bomber downward with top rudder. He unloosened his belt. Perhaps he would be thrown clear of the fire—

There was a crash, and he felt himself hurtling through the air. The next second his brain became a ball of fire which was extinguished in an instant and there was no more pain.

HE DID not know it, but Tex had doubled back as his pursuer had fallen from his horse, and his hands had beat out the slowly burning spots in Daly's clothing. Ten minutes later a Laredo ship had arrived, and carried him back to the hospital. It was there he found himself, next morning, thoroughly bandaged and listless from the effects of opiates.

Scarcely had he opened his eyes when the nurse came in, followed by MacDowell. The big Texan was unshaven, eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep, and as dirty as a roustabout, but the old grin

was there and there was a sparkle in his eyes which took no heed of fatigue.

"You probably don't feel so good, but I feel fine," he drawled. "They say you're all right—burns not so damn' serious, and lungs O.K."

Daly smiled briefly.

"How is everything in the oil village?" he asked weakly.

"Not so bad. Did you know that the ship you shot down had Hank Ivers in it?"

"Uh-huh, I thought so."

"Tell me what happened up there first after I left," Tex commanded.

He was sitting on the edge of the bed, and his glowing eyes were hard for Daly to meet. Daly told the story briefly and haltingly, and MacDowell's eyes grew brighter all the time.

"Well," he said slowly, "I guess, as a matter of fact, that there were only a couple of people who knew about that Fitzpatrick incident. One was Ivers, and the other this head bandit that had me in charge. He was enjoying himself so much I was scared of what would happen. The rest of 'em were just supers. Dumb spigs, in for a little money. From the way he talked, this blond boy—you remember we saw him on the street—was a follower of Dave Fitzpatrick's, and to get me, who'd got Dave put in jail, was a great pleasure. Between him and Ivers, from what you said, I'd have had a nice time."

"Laredo got my message all right, did they?"

"Sure. And found the town in a hell of a mess. The sheriff's there now with a big posse. I guess he isn't happy. They like to let these oil towns alone—but it had to be done. The boys here say you told 'em to get Conklin and Derringer and hold 'em. Well, they found Slats badly wounded. Some guy he'd rooked took a pot shot at him in the fights, I guess."

"Is he alive?"

"Yeah, but nobody knows whether he'll live or not," Tex said without sorrow. "I tipped off the sheriff and, sick or no sick, they gave him the third degree. Didn't need much. He figures he's a goner and came pretty clean. Admits everything, including airplane smuggling on the side, except that he was not in on the kidnaping at all and had nothing to do with it. It was Ivers' cute little idea to have dad pay him fifty thousand which he hadn't spent, see?"

"How's that little banty rooster, Conklin?" inquired Daly, and for a second a real grin was on his pallid, drawn face.

Tex laughed long and loud.

"He admitted what he was up to, and the little squirt was pretty near right. He'd been about ruined by Derringer's crooked work, and he aimed to get a chance to live by fair means or foul. He didn't want us messing in just at the moment when he started to take Derringer for a ride. They let him go, I guess—nothing on him that isn't taken for granted in a town like that."

Daly felt better. Somehow it always gave him a feeling of contentment to have Tex around. It was great to have an anchor of some sort, somebody to tie to. He was busy figuring things out more in detail.

"Assuming that this bandit I killed—"

"He had the poker money, which I got!" Tex interrupted with a grin.

"Good. Anyway, assuming that he was tickled to be in on the deal just to get back at a patrolman who'd put his boss in jail, how do you explain Ivers? He was sure poison."

Tex nodded.

"Dad's coming down in a week," he stated. "Wired me, in answer to mine, that it must have its root in some business deal where dad got the best of him. Probably partly just the money angle, too. Dad said he was always a penny pincher, and through that lost out on a lot of stuff around Texas in the past. You never can tell about these fifteen year grudges. They get big when you think of 'em all that time. Dad fights hard, but he fights clean. I know that."

"Also," nodded the Duke, "all this murder and stuff he was driven to. When

a guy starts to steal and the gun's around, murder isn't far away and the deeper he gets the longer lengths he'll go to to get out."

"Right you are," drawled MacDowell as he got to his feet. "It's my hunch he'd have shrunk from killing in real horror at the start. But this bandit guy—he was looking at me and licking his chops. Those breeds—and he is one—are tough to figure. Resent the inferior blood in 'em, and are run by it."

He gave Daly a cigaret, lighted one for himself, and strolled to the door.

"I'll get out before they kick me out," he announced. "See you this afternoon. Everything's jake, and don't worry about the papers, if you get what I mean. Ivers and the bandit are both out of the way, and your memoirs won't be published."

Daly smiled and took a deep breath. The blow which would have knocked him out of sight of the world he loved would not fall—not yet, anyhow. Some day it would, probably.

"And say, Duke," MacDowell said casually. "Thanks for the help last night."

His eyes were on his cigaret. Daly's were on his, examining the ash critically.

"Sure. Everything came out great," he said evenly, "even to the acreage, if Derringer confessed."

"Right you are," Tex said a trifle huskily. "Mission successfully completed, doggone your crazy hide!"

W. C. TUTTLE

tells of a whittling sheriff and the feud of Mojave Wells

BY ORDER *of* BUCK BRADY

BUCK BRADY was always whittling. Thin shavings were an obsession with Buck. He would sit for hours, tilted back in a broken chair against the shady side of his little office, knees almost touching his chin, his long, thin face serious over the task of reducing a piece of soft pine to thin shavings.

Buck was the sheriff of Mojave Wells, and Mojave Wells was a heat and sand scoured, false fronted town in Road Runner Valley. The town was invisible from a distance, because even the painted signs on the business houses had been sand blasted until they were unreadable.

It was the end of the roundup in Road Runner Valley, and Buck knew that before night the town would be filled with thirsty cowboys, whose overall pockets were lined with money, and that when whisky met cowboy there might be plenty of work for the sheriff.

The first to arrive was Ben Dolan, a thin faced, gaunt sort of cowboy, astride a weary looking roan. Instead of heading for a saloon, Ben dismounted in front of the sheriff's office, dropped his reins in the dirt and sat down beside the sheriff.

"Hyah, Buck."

"Purty good," drawled Buck squinting at his handiwork. "Whatcha know, Ben?"

"Not much."

"In kinda early, ain't you?"

"Yeah."

Ben made a few marks in the sand with a lean forefinger.

"Had a reason t' come in early, Buck. Some of the boys said it wouldn't do no good, but I thought I'd tell you how it was. 'Long about an hour from now Bud

Hickman will ride in. He'll have his gang with him and they'll imbibe real freely. Mebbe 'long about that same time Pete Asher'll ride in with his gang. They'll also imbibe freely, and some of 'em will likely get kinda drunk. The boys are all thirsty, you know. I expect it'll be kinda wooly around here t'night, Buck."

"Uh-huh."

Buck cut a particularly long shaving, looked at it critically and nodded with satisfaction.

"You shore rode in early to explain all this to me," he said. "If you're all through, you might tell me the rest."

"It's thisaway," explained Ben seriously. "You know what a feud is, Buck?"

"Yea-a-ah."

"Well, that's what she amounts to right now. And it's all over a danged girl!"

"I'm glad there's a reason, Ben. Mostly allus them feuds starts over nothin'. Go ahead and tell me the details."

"Rosie Smith."

"Huh?"

"That's what I said. You know how Bud and Pete kinda shined around her a month ago. I don't guess she knowed which one to pick. Of course, Bud thinks it's him, and Pete thinks it's him. And there you are. It's been kinda achin' both of 'em, I reckon. Anyway, Chuck Lester makes a remark the other night that he supposed Bud wouldn't be with us in Mojave Wells at the finish of the roundup, 'cause he'd stop along a picket fence before he reached the main street, and head straight through the gate.

"Pete was there, and I reckon it hit him in a sore spot, 'cause he chips in with a remark, which didn't set well with Bud. There wasn't much said, but it took all of us to take their guns away. We didn't want no killin' in camp. Bud was reasonable. He says to Pete, 'We'll settle this in Mojave Wells.' "

"Pete was agreeable. He says, 'That suits me. We'll make a truce until sundown, both agreein' to keep away from her. When that sun goes down, all truce is off, and we shoot on sight.' "

BUCK sliced another shaving, laid the stick aside and began whetting the blade on the counter of his left boot.

"And one of them damn' fools is goin' to get killed," added Ben.

"It's kinda hard to git straight grain stuff these days," said the sheriff seriously. "I 'member when I was runnin' a tradin' post down Yuma way, I used to git the best danged boxwood for whittlin'. I don't suppose it runs so good these days."

"Ben and Pete are both friends of yours," said Ben thoughtfully.

"Uh-huh. I like 'em both."

"A killin' might start trouble. The boys has kinda took sides."

"I s'pose."

"Bud and Pete are both good shots."

"Yea-a-ah—purty good shots. Awful damn' fools in lotsa ways, but good shots. Uh-hu-u-uh. Well, I've got to write me some signs, Ben. It's two hours till sundown."

"I thought you'd like to know about it, Sheriff."

"Yeah, I do. Thank you kindly."

"You're welcome."

Ben took his horse and headed for a saloon, while more cowboys came racing in, their horses covered with lather and dust. The sheriff watched the first contingent arrive. It was Bud Hickman and his gang from the Tumbling K. Bud was a likable looking cowboy, about twenty-five years of age, tall, lithe, swarthy as an Indian, with curling black hair and a white toothed smile. His crew was a wild riding lot of hard bitted punchers, ready for fun or fight at a moment's notice.

They noted that Pete Asher and the J88 boys had not arrived yet; so they all headed for the Desert Well Saloon, the biggest place of its kind in Mojave Wells. The sheriff stood on the edge of the sidewalk for a while, cogitating deeply. He had been sheriff of that particular county for nearly two terms, which meant that Buck Brady was pretty much of a man. Finally he went into his little office, and after a search he found an old paint brush

and a few ounces of almost dried paint in a battered can. He kicked the ends out of a soap box, drew out the nails and sat down at his desk.

Pete Asher and his crew rode in from the J88, tied their horses farther up the street and entered the Prospect Saloon. Asher was a heavily built, hard faced cowboy, about the same age as Bud Hickman. His hair was almost a neutral shade, his eyes deep set and blue. There was little to choose between his gang and the one which came in with Bud Hickman, and in numbers they were about equal.

There were more outfits to come, but they were not connected with the feud. Bud and his men were at the bar when the sheriff came in, and they greeted him noisily. He was carrying a box end and a hammer, and without any leave from the proprietor he proceeded to nail his sign to one of the walls. It read:

FROM NOW ON EVERY MAN
MUST TURN HIS GUN OVER
TO MY OFFICE UNTIL HE IS
READY TO LEAVE TOWN.
BY ORDER OF
—BUCK BRADY.

SOME of the men laughed; some swore. Bud Hickman strode over to the sheriff and glared at him belligerently.

"You tryin' to kid somebody, Buck?" he asked.

The sheriff looked steadily at Bud for several moments.

"I ain't in the habit of kiddin' anybody, am I?"

Bud flushed quickly, but he recognized the fact that Buck Brady would back up his sign. That was why Buck was their sheriff.

"Kinda sudden, ain'tcha?" asked Bud.

"No-o-o. I've been thinkin' this out quite a while, Bud."

"Is this the idea?" queried Bud. "We all turn our guns over to you, and you turn 'em back when we're ready to leave town?"

"That's what the sign says, Bud; and I wrote the sign."

Bud laughed and turned to his men.

"It's all right, boys. Shuck your guns. I reckon we can stand it, if the others can." And then to the sheriff, "You might have a little trouble with Pete and his gang."

"I hope they'll be reasonable."

The men put their guns on a poker table, and the sheriff picked them up, putting some in his pockets, some inside the waistband of his overalls.

"You'll have to remember your own guns, boys," he said.

"I reckon I can spot mine," said Bud. "I made them handles."

THE SHERIFF thanked them kindly and went back to his office, where he locked the guns in his desk. Then he went over to the Prospect Saloon, where he nailed up his other notice. Asher and his men didn't take so kindly to the idea. Some of them were openly belligerent, and it seemed for a few moments that the sheriff had a tough job, but Asher took the matter out of their hands.

"I suppose this thing only applies to me and my men, eh?"

"You're supposin' wrong, Pete; I've already collected from the Tumblin' K."

"You've collected from Bud Hickman?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, I jist wondered. But suppose we don't give you our guns?"

The sheriff considered Pete calmly. Then:

"I've allus liked you, Asher. You've been a damn' fool in lotsa ways, but you're jist human like the rest of us. I've posted my notice, and I wrote it myself."

"But jist suppose we refuse to give up our guns?"

"That," said the sheriff calmly, "would be jist too damn' bad."

"Oh—" softly—"and if I should happen to want to leave town, you'd give me back my gun?"

"Jist like the sign says, Pete."

"All right; here's mine. Take 'em off, boys. We don't need 'em—now."

The sheriff looked over the guns as he deposited them about his person; he walked out, swinging the hammer in his hand.

"Don't that beat hell?" laughed Pete.

"I'll betcha somebody told him somethin'," said a cowboy.

"I don't like the idea of a moth eaten old sidewinder takin' my gun away," complained a cowboy who was new to the country. "We'd 'a' had some fun, if we'd refused."

"You've got a sweet idea of fun," growled Pete. "That moth eaten old sidewinder is jist thirty-two years old, and if we hadn't turned them guns over to him he'd jist about ruined the whole gang of us with his pet Winchester. When you see 'By order of Buck Brady,' you better read the upper part of it and act accordingly."

ALL THE cowboys went back to their drinking, and the sheriff was forgotten, but both Bud and Pete kept track of the sun. The sheriff, humped in his chair, still whittling, saw Pete come out, saunter to the hitching rack, where he could view the sun. It was still an hour high.

Ben Dolan, fairly well filled with liquor, came over again and squatted on his heels beside the sheriff. Ben was as hard bitted as the rest of the cowboys, but he liked both Bud and Pete so well that he hated to see either of them wounded or killed. And Ben was wise enough to understand that both men would claim their guns at sundown.

They saw Bud leave the Desert Well Saloon, walk halfway across the street, as if heading for a store, stop and look toward the west. He too was keeping cases on the sun. Then he turned and went back to the saloon. Ben made meaningless marks in the sand with a forefinger, while the sheriff whittled thoughtfully.

"You shore collected a lot of guns, Sheriff."

"Yea-a-ah."

"Almost sundown."

The sheriff shut one eye and considered Ben. Then he looked toward both saloons, and went on whittling.

"The boys are gettin' nervous," said Ben.

"I notice."

Several cowboys were standing in front of the Prospect Saloon now, and one of them essayed a clog dance. His boots sounded loud on the old wooden sidewalk. Another beat time on a porch post with the end of a quirt. It was like the beating of a tomtom, and he kept it up for a time after the dancer had stopped. The beater was swarthy, with high cheek bones.

Some of Bud's gang came from the Desert Well and stood around in front of the building. One of them, a little drunker than the rest, started across the street toward the sheriff's office, but the others stopped him and, after an argument, persuaded him to desist.

"It's kinda sultry," said Ben, rubbing his forehead.

The sheriff nodded and looked at the sun, only half of which was visible now. He blinked from the strong light and cut several shavings, which did not suit him at all. A couple of dogs met in the middle of the street; town dogs, fat and with a friendship of long standing. But now they growled ominously at each other, as they circled, looking for an opening.

"Sic 'em!" hissed a cowboy from in front of the Desert Well.

"Take him, Tige! Shake his fleas loose. Four bits on the yaller one."

"You've done made a bet, cowboy. Choose him, Ponto."

But the dogs only circled and growled, and finally separated.

"Mebbe they're waitin' for the sun to go down," whispered Ben.

The sheriff shook his head.

"Got more sense than men have."

THE SUN was down. Only the tip was visible, and the crests of the broken hills showed a golden highlight. It was very still in Mojave Wells. The shadows were gone now and the street

glowed with a yellow light, which would not last long. Twilight was unknown in Mojave Wells. Sundown, a streak of gold, would quickly fade to blue, and then darkness.

Bud Hickman came from the Desert Well and went straight to the hitch rack, where he untied his horse and swung into the saddle. Simultaneously with Bud's move, Pete Asher came riding from the rack beside the Prospect. It was not a casual move. They intended to deceive nobody, not even the sheriff of Mojave Wells. The cowboys of both outfits were in the street, watching intently.

Bud came straight to the sheriff, and fifty feet behind him was Pete. Bud's face was grim, his mouth set in a thin line.

"I'm pullin' out, Buck," he said softly. "Would you mind handin' me my gun?"

The sheriff stopped whittling, tilted forward in his chair and got slowly to his feet. He looked closely at Bud, but said nothing, as he turned and went into the office. Pete moved in closer, but he and Bud ignored each other. Ben sighed and leaned against the wall.

The sheriff came out, carrying a gun in each hand. For several moments he looked at the two men rather sorrowfully.

"I reckon you're pullin' out, too, ain'tcha, Pete?"

Pete nodded quickly and held out his hand for the gun. They had been friends, these two, until a woman had come between them. Bud holstered his gun, swung his horse around and rode slowly down the street, looking straight ahead. Pete accepted his gun, glanced at it to see that it was fully loaded, snapped it down in his holster and swung his horse around, riding back to the center of the street.

Ben swore softly under his breath. Both of these men were good revolver shots.

"Goin' to be a funeral around here —mebbe two," he muttered. "Why don'tcha stop it, Buck? Gawd A'mighty, this ain't right! Look at Bud—he's turnin'!"

"You didn't expect he'd run away, didja?"

The contestants in this desert town drama were two hundred feet apart, facing each other, both horses moving slowly. They had both played a square game. There was no advantage now. Two hundred feet is a long shot. Both men had drawn their guns. Bud's horse was dancing a little, and he spurred it viciously.

Pete waited.

Ben's hands were gripping the wall beside him. He had seen gun fights before, but they had all been unpremeditated affairs. This one was too much like an execution. The groups of cowboys were as immobile as dummy figures. Even the horses at the hitch racks had ceased moving.

Bud and Pete were closing the gap between them, closing it slowly, each waiting for the other to make the first move with a gun. They were only a hundred feet apart now. It was close enough. But neither of them made a move to lift his gun.

Ninety feet; thirty yards. Either of them could hit a tomato can at that distance. Eighty feet! Horses walking slowly. Seventy feet; sixty feet. Twenty yards now. They were almost in front of the sheriff's office. Ben laughed foolishly. It would be a double funeral. He had seen Bud shoot the head from a prairie dog at that distance.

"It's a nice evenin' for it," said the sheriff rather inanely.

And then it happened!

BOTH guns came up at exactly the same instant. Ben's eyes snapped shut and he turned his head aside.

Came a tiny *ping*, hardly louder than the mere snapping of a revolver hammer. Another and another. Bud's eyes jerked open. The two riders were thirty feet apart, leaning forward in their saddles. Not a shot had been fired.

With a swift movement, Bud Hickman swung out the cylinder of his Colt and emptied the cartridges in his hand. Every

primer had been dented. There were marks on the bullets, marks made by the jaws of a pair of pliers.

Pete was swearing viciously, as he drew cartridges from his belt and started to stuff them in his gun.

But the sheriff halted him with a sharp word.

"Damn you, you pulled the powder on my shells!" snarled Pete.

"Yeah; and I'll pull somethin' else out of you, if you make one more move," said the sheriff calmly. "C'mere, Bud."

Bud rode up to him, still holding the empty gun in his hand. Pete had quit trying to load his gun. They looked coldly at each other.

"You boys hadn't ort to fight," said the sheriff calmly. "Both of you goin' off kinda half cocked, as you might say."

The men from both outfits had moved in close now, trying to understand what it was all about, their enmity all but forgotten in this queer turn of events.

"I pulled them bullets," admitted the sheriff. "I don't reckon either of you showed any yaller streak. You played the game square, and I like you both for it. Personally I kinda enjoyed it. It was like lookin' at a show. I was the only one that knowed how it would turn out."

"Was it any of your damn' business how it turned out?" demanded Pete hotly.

"In a way, it was, Pete—" calmly. "Barrin' my friendship with both of you, and my position as sheriff, it still was my business, in a way. Now, you two boys was aimin' to kill each other over a woman. Yeah, Ben told me about it. You might thank Ben instead of glarin' at him.

"He liked both of you, and he didn't want no killin' done; so he told me about it. I don't think for a minute that this Smith girl would care to have you killin' each other over her. Most girls don't. Anyway, it was a sucker idea, because there ain't no Smith girl around here any more; so you was tryin' to kill each other for nothin'."

"What do you mean?" blurted Bud.

"The Smiths ain't moved away," offered a cowboy.

"If you hadn't had so much killin' on your mind, you might have found out that me and the Smith girl was married over a week ago. You boys better go back and have your spree, as soon as you give me back them guns, 'cause I've got work to do."

"Whittlin'?" asked Bud blankly.

"Lookin' for somethin' to whittle on."

The WHITE ELEPHANT

A Story of the Teak Forests of Siam

By CLARK BROCKMAN

WILLIAM SOMMERFIELD, the British teak *walla* in charge of the work in the Me Mai concession of the Further India Corporation in North Siam, sat in the camp chair in front of his tent. Before him stretched the dark walled avenue cut through the jungle a few months before by a wild tropical storm. Across its farther end flowed the Me Mai, still muddy from the recent rains. On a high limb of a dead cottonwood tree rising from the opposite bank, two grotesque hornbills carried on their amours.

Sommerfield stretched his long, angular arms luxuriously and inhaled the opiate fragrance of the slender white blossoms of the *dawk cham pee*. He gazed at the patch of brown water down the avenue. A great teak log floated lazily on its muddy surface. A faint smile twitched the corners of his firm mouth. He ran his long fingers through his thin, sandy hair. That log was a straggler.

During the preceding forty-eight hours there had been a rain the like of which had not been heard of in years, and more than twenty thousand logs that had been lying in the dry bed of the stream for eight years had been floated out to the river and started

on the way to Bangkok. In those few hours he had justified his recent transfer to the Me Mai. He had succeeded where others had failed. It had meant almost thirty hours of constant toil, but it had been accomplished, and fourteen hours of sound sleep had put him in the best of spirits.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, and the boy was just removing the breakfast dishes. Sommerfield had decided to take a day off. He would inspect no logs. He would break his way through no jungle. He would rest, read his mail and get what pleasure there was in life for a jungle *walla* exiled from civilization.

When the breakfast dishes had been removed, the boy brought out the stack of mail that a carrier had brought from Chiengmai the day before. Sommerfield had been too tired to read them then, but gazed at them hungrily as the boy placed them on the table. He crossed the tanned knees between his shorts and golf hose and settled himself for a comfortable morning.

His feeling of satisfaction and contentment was dispelled by the first letter he read. It was a letter from Hodgkins in Bangkok. At varying intervals Hodgkins sent to all members of the company a copy of his Further India Teak Tirade, a breezy letter giving the news and gossip of interest to every member of the company. The letter which Sommerfield opened was written in a more serious vein than was habitual with Hodgkins. The first paragraph was as follows:

TEAK *WALLAS* TO BE DISCHARGED

Yesterday it became known that the rumors which have been afloat for the past two months are confirmed. The lease on the Prae Jungle which was denied the Further India Corporation on the ground that the government would itself extract the teak, has been granted to the Compagnie General d'Extreme Oriente. As this is the last uncut jungle in the country, the work of the corporation will probably end with the work now under way. Unless the company is able to do something immediately to ingratiate itself with the government, there will be no chance of finding further work for the assistants. As only two men can be used in Burma, the jungle *wallas* may expect to have home leave and discharges within the next two years.

Sommerfield reread the paragraph. He knew that it was not official, but he also knew that it contained more truth than poetry. He cursed the day he had signed up with the company and cursed himself for not resigning years before, when he would have been able to get into some other kind of work. For twelve years he had given the company his all, and now he was to be turned out with no hope for the future.

HE CURSED the government. "A bunch of fools clutching for a straw like a drowning man," he muttered. "Currying favor with France, with the hope that if the crash comes French troops will keep the king on his throne. And why the crash? The ignorance of blind fools. The tradition that if Buddha approves of a new king, a white elephant will be born in the kingdom. Can't the new king reign without a white elephant? But, no, he calls in all the mossbacks as advisors. They get excited because there is no white elephant. Their fright spreads to the people and the rulers fear insurrections conjured up by their own imaginations. Damn them!"

He pictured himself in England looking for a position. He knew he was not fitted for work at home even if he could find it. His years in the jungle had made him "jungle shy". He was afraid of people. He spent the Christmas holidays on hunting trips with some other jungle *wallas*, because he was afraid of the crowds that gathered at Chiengmai and Lampang during the holidays. He knew he would be terrified if he had to accept a position in a place where there would be a lot of people around him.

His last home leave had been pleasant in a way, and yet the only times he felt at ease were those when he was in a big armchair in a corner of the club, talking to another jungle man, who was also on leave.

"Boy!" shouted Sommerfield.

The boy appeared from behind the tent.

"Whisky soda."

The boy disappeared and in a moment

was back with the bottles and a glass. Sommerfield poured himself a stiff drink and gulped it down.

The boy's eyes opened in amazement.

"The Nai drinks, yes, but he does not go at it with both feet in the trough as the Americans do," he said to himself. Behind the tent he gave vent to his surprise. "Bad news from *Muang Nawk*—the foreign country—" he announced, and discussed the possible nature of the news with the cook and coolies.

When Sommerfield had finished his letters he ripped the wrappers from the six copies of the Bangkok *Times*, arranged them in chronological order and started to read. The lurid details of the strike in England, and the general unemployment situation offered a strange fascination. He was reading a description of how college students were running the busses in London, when one of the men from the elephant camp rushed into the clearing.

"Sir, Father Eclipse of the Moon is on *must*. *Maa!* he is as terrible as a cholera breeding spirit. He has been tied, but he is breaking loose and we can do nothing."

Sommerfield's first impulse was to say that he did not care what happened, but he smothered the idea. He was still in charge of the work on the Me Mai. Father Eclipse of the Moon was the great tusker who had succeeded in breaking the stacks of logs that had formed in the stream during the high water and had made it possible to float the logs down the river. They had expected the tusker to go on *must*. Black oil had been oozing from his *must* holes for several days, but during the rise in the stream, Red Moon, his rider, had been able to control him.

"Where is he?" demanded Sommerfield.

"Tied to a tree in the elephant camp," replied the native, "but he is breaking loose and we can not get near him."

"Has Nai Kow called in the other elephants?"

"No, sir, we are all trying to get a rope around his hind legs."

"Has that descendant of stupid buffaloes never heard that trained elephants can hold a wild one while he is being tied? Tell him to call in the other elephants. Hurry!"

The man disappeared down the jungle trail on the run. Sommerfield picked up his heavy walking stick and followed more leisurely, but at a rapid walk.

Before he reached the camp he could hear the bellowings and trumpetings of the great tusker as he struggled to break loose from the bonds that held him. Now and then he could hear the shout of one of the natives.

WHEN Sommerfield came into the clearing of the elephant camp, he saw Father Eclipse of the Moon standing beneath a great tree. He was bellowing and growling. His mammoth head swung from side to side, his ears flapped, and his tail lashed angrily. Around him a group of natives in their blue, red bordered suits and black turbans were busily engaged in getting in each other's way, but keeping clear of the elephant.

"Scions of generations of pariah hounds, shut up," commanded Sommerfield as soon as he reached the group.

The men stopped their shouting and waited for orders.

"Have you sent for the other elephants?" Sommerfield asked of Nai Kow, the headman of the camp, who Sommerfield insisted was the living proof of the soundness of the Darwinian theory.

"Yes, sir. I sent six men to find them and ordered them to come quickly." Nai Kow's beady little eyes shifted as he spoke.

"Do you think he can get loose, Red Moon?" Sommerfield asked the great tusker's rider, who had been darting in almost under the elephant's feet in attempts to slip a noose over its hind legs. Red Moon was tall for a native, broad shouldered and muscular. He was so quick, energetic and resourceful that Sommerfield thought he must have some Chinese blood in him.

"Sir, last night I hobbled his front feet and chained them to the big tree. Then I tied his two hind feet to those two trees. I knew he would be like a cholera spirit

today. He roared and bellowed all night and at dawn became even more angry. *Maa!* he pulled and snorted and puffed like one of the fire wagons at Chiengmai. He broke first one of the ropes holding his hind legs, and then, after much jerking and pulling, broke the other. I did not become worried until he started to break the hobbles. I have never seen an elephant break a six ply rattan hobble; but see, two of the strands have been broken."

While Red Moon was speaking, Father Eclipse of the Moon was milling around the tree, snorting, trumpeting and bellowing. He was fighting desperately for freedom. He was moving so continuously that it was with difficulty that Sommerfield was able to keep his eye on the hobbles.

Father Eclipse of the Moon had jerked and twisted his feet so viciously that the links of the chain had worn through two tough pieces of rattan and it was only a matter of time before the others would be broken and then there would be trouble. The nine foot tusker was normally gentle and docile, but demented by the pressure of the *must* glands on his brain, he would kill any one in his path.

AS SOMMERFIELD watched, the big elephant jerked back on his bonds until the chain was taut. He bellowed, slapped the ground with his trunk and curled the tip around the stray ends of rattan. He twisted and pulled so viciously that the tough plaited hobbles were wrenched almost out of shape. Another strand broke.

"Ropes," ordered Sommerfield.

"Here, sir," said Red Moon.

Sommerfield tied a running noose on the end, drew out a big loop and handed it to Red Moon.

"Lay that on the ground there beside his back feet. If he steps in it, jerk upwards and pull quickly."

Without hesitation Red Moon ran in close to the animal's feet and dropped his rope. Father Eclipse of the Moon kicked viciously, missing him by inches. With a stick Red Moon straightened out the noose, so as to give plenty of room for the big feet.

"Get poles and beat him on this side. Force his rump around over the noose," ordered Sommerfield.

The men obeyed eagerly. They pounded, beat, and jabbed his hind quarters with anything they could lay hold of. Father Eclipse of the Moon reacted to the punishment by bellowing the louder, kicking more viciously and straining to get loose. He was stepping on the edge of the loop time and time again.

The men became excited and a little careless. One of them, with a light bamboo, got his pole too near the elephant's head. Father Eclipse of the Moon lurched suddenly, extended his trunk, wrapped it around the stick and twisted it from the man's hand.

"Jump!" shouted Sommerfield, but it was too late.

Although the pole was wielded awkwardly, it descended on the man's back and knocked him to the ground. In a second the great foot was over his prostrate form ready to crush out a life and grind a body to a pulp. Sommerfield was among the men before the foot could descend, and he broke his heavy walking stick on the animal's toes. The movement of the foot was delayed a fraction of a second. During that moment, Nai Kow, who had caught the man's foot, jerked him out to safety.

Father Eclipse of the Moon, robbed of his prey, became more violent, and slashed madly with his pole. The men were already out of range. Bellowing and roaring, he whirled the pole above his head and hurled it at the group. His aim was bad and the pole missed the men by several feet. He was still as far from the noose as ever, and another strand had been broken.

Sommerfield ordered the men to try again, and Red Moon moved the noose closer.

Father Eclipse of the Moon lunged backward again. The fifth strand gave way under the tremendous pressure.

"Run for your lives!" shouted Sommerfield.

The warning was useless. The men were already disappearing. The Britisher knew that he was in greater danger than the others. He could not reach the cover of the jungle before the tusker would be upon him. A house would be of no protection, as Father Eclipse of the Moon could knock it to a pulp in one charge and Sommerfield could not climb a tree like a barefoot native. He looked for a tree that was easy to climb and yet strong enough to stand under the charges of an infuriated elephant.

"The rope!" shouted Red Moon, as he pointed to the rope hanging from a large tying tree a few yards away.

Sommerfield ran for it, made all the height he could on his jump, and started laboriously up toward the branches. Something caught his legs and he was lifted a full two feet. It was Red Moon. With his hands under the soles of Sommerfield's feet, he helped again. The Britisher's hand caught the limb. He raised his legs and wrapped them about it affectionately.

As he raised his chin above the branch a wild trumpet of rage echoed through the jungle. Sommerfield saw that the great tusker had broken loose from the tree and was gazing around as if bewildered, his trunk outstretched and his ears cocked.

"Hurry," whispered Sommerfield.

THE TUSKER caught sight of the dangling figure, and with another trumpet, charged.

Red Moon was coming up the rope like a monkey. Sommerfield braced himself in the branches, reached down, caught the rider's hand and with one jerk swung him to the branch, as the elephant's extended trunk caught the rope and snapped it as if it had been a piece of twine. Furiously, Father Eclipse of the Moon charged the tree. It shook, but held. Again the elephant charged.

"He can't get us," panted Red Moon. "This will never come down."

The tusker tried again and bellowed with rage.

In the distance, Sommerfield caught cries of warning.

"Take your elephants away! Father Eclipse of the Moon is loose. Flee!"

Father Eclipse of the Moon also heard the cry, and made off in the direction of the sound. As he passed a sapling he snapped it as if it had been a reed and disappeared into the jungle, waving it over his head.

Both Sommerfield and Red Moon sat motionless listening to the crashing of the undergrowth. When the noise of the charge was no longer audible they could still hear an occasional trumpet and an angry bellow. Even these sounds died out in the distance. Slowly they came down, and as they did, they saw the men slipping from trees and emerging from the surrounding wall of jungle.

Nai Kow was the first to arrive.

"Send for Sewai," ordered Sommerfield. "Tell him to bring his poisoned arrows and shoot Father Eclipse of the Moon. Tell him that I will give him ten ticals more than the usual price if he gets him today, but also tell him that I do not want the elephant shot full of arrows. Just in the foot and just enough to cripple him temporarily. You understand?"

"*Kow chai*—understood," replied the head man.

He turned to one of the men and gave the orders, telling the man to make all possible speed.

"Sewai is not at home," broke in a deep voice.

Sommerfield turned to see who was speaking. It was Panya, the aged and shriveled spirit doctor, who was somewhat of a demigod in the district, because of his supposed control over the legions of evil spirits that daily harassed the jungle people. Sommerfield had known Panya for years and had had long and interesting talks with the old man on the subject of spirits and exorcism. Panya was no charlatan. He was a real student of his profession and honestly believed in his amulets and formulas.

"Where is Sewai?" asked Sommerfield.

"He has gone to shoot Paa Luang, Chow Rajaboot's tusker who has been on *must* for the past two weeks and has

already killed two men, wrecked a village and killed one of the prince's best elephants and gored several others. As long as Paa Luang only killed men and wrecked villages, the *chow* did not bother about him, but when he started killing other elephants, the *chow* became excited. He told Sewai to shoot him immediately. That elephant is a devil at all times, but when he is on *must* he is worse than a spirit tiger. He will kill anything he sees."

"When did Sewai start out to find Paa Luang?"

"Only about an hour ago. He ought to find the elephant today, because when last seen, Paa Luang was not far away and was coming in this direction."

Sommerfield turned to Red Moon.

"Go find Sewai and tell him I will give him fifteen ticals extra if he cripples Father Eclipse of the Moon before night."

AFTER a few questions as to where Sewai might be found, Red Moon started off hurriedly. The camp, which had been deserted, now assumed its normal appearance. The men sat in a circle discussing the rage and fierceness of the great tusker. The men told Panya of his terrible strength and how he had broken loose. The stories they told were such wonderful fabrications that Sommerfield stayed to listen.

As the tale was nearing completion, Boon, the rider of a quiet female elephant, rushed up breathlessly.

"Bua Kam calved this morning and the calf is an albino!" he exclaimed. "She would not let me get close to touch the calf, but I could see the hairs on his tail. They are white, as white as cooked rice!"

The group of natives stared at Boon as if he had announced the end of the world. They were incredulous, bewildered, stunned.

"It is true, Nai Som-er-fee," he said, turning to the Britisher. "It is true. I thought I was crazy when I first saw it. I rubbed the eyes. I pounded the head. I looked again. The hairs on the tail *are* white! And there are five toes on the right front foot. I saw them, too. His whole body is pinkish and covered with white hairs."

"Where did you get your opium?" asked Sommerfield.

"Nai Som-er-fee, I do not smoke opium. I sell my allowance of opium every month. It is true. Come and see."

Sommerfield knew that it was possible that the calf was a white elephant, or albino, as the Siamese word should be translated; but he also knew that the chances against its being a white elephant were more than a thousand to one. If it were a white elephant, he knew it was a startling event—an event important enough to bolster up the tottering destinies of the government. He recalled the letter from Hodgkins. "Unless the company can do something to ingratiate itself with the government—" Ingratiate itself? If it were really a white elephant, the company could get anything it wanted. He would not be discharged. He would not have to look for a situation in England. For a moment Sommerfield saw a long and pleasant career as a jungle *walla* stretching out before him and then put the thought out of his mind. Why raise false hopes?

"Nai Som-er-fee, I believe Boon is telling the truth," said Panya, the spirit doctor. "Many omens have foretold the birth. You have just witnessed the last. Father Eclipse of the Moon is the young elephant's sire. You have seen an exhibition of strength and power which, to my knowledge, no elephant has ever displayed. This morning Father Eclipse of the Moon went on *must* and at the same time the young elephant was born. That prodigious strength of the great tusker was the strength of Buddha. The white elephant will be as strong as his father, and the king will be as much greater than other men as Father Eclipse of the Moon is greater than other elephants.

"I have noticed other omens. Probably Nai Som-er-fee did not notice that three days ago there was a large white cloud in the eastern sky which took the form of a white elephant. The head was

fully formed and at first the trunk hung down with a slight curl at the tip; but as I watched, the trunk curled over the forehead as if the cloud elephant were saluting the king. As the sun set, the whole body of the cloud elephant was changed to a deep pink, which, Nai Som-er-fee knows, is the real color of an albino elephant. The tail remained white long after the rest of the body had been colored by the rays of the setting sun, and I doubt not that it will be found that there are white hairs on the tail."

"It is true," broke in Boon.

"And if his tail is white," continued Panya, "he is a white elephant in spite of any other qualities he may lack. Nai Som-er-fee has heard the old proverb: 'When buying an elephant study his tail; when buying a wife, study her mother.'

"That, Nai Som-er-fee, was the first omen. Then, that night, there was a rain the like of which has not been heard of in this region for a hundred years. There was no stint to Buddha's generosity. I have been told that your company floated out logs that have been lying in the bed of the Me Mai for over ten years. That rain flooded rice fields that were parched, and it will flood rice fields from here to Krung Tape—Bangkok—as it flows down the river.

"After such a rain as that to usher in his representative, would God Buddha give us an elephant that is only partially white? I have not seen, Nai Som-er-fee, but I believe that the elephant is white, as Boon has told us. I believe that the new king has great merit and that God is showing his approval by sending an elephant perfect in all eight points. He is also showing his approval of the company by having his representative arrive in its herd. The company has great merit."

SOMMERFIELD smiled in appreciation of the old man's compliment.

"Nai Panya, how does this show that Buddha approves of the new king?"

"The ancient tradition says that there is a white elephant born in the kingdom whenever a new king comes to the throne —if that king has the approval of God Buddha. It he does not have the approval, no white elephant is born. The white elephant is therefore the representative of Buddha. Some say that it is Buddha himself coming in the form of an elephant, but I doubt that. That Buddha did come to earth once in the form of a white elephant is beyond question—every priest will tell you that—but that was many years ago.

"In ancient times the king sent princes to escort the white elephant to his palace. A gorgeous hall was erected in the palace grounds for his abode. Dancing girls and musicians were in constant attendance. He was fed by slaves in splendid uniforms, who offered him food on platters of silver and gold. A body of priests were appointed to chant prayers before him and also to give him instruction in conduct and manners. Singers from the royal opera sang him to sleep. He was treated as the Buddha himself might be treated.

"But the late king forgot the ways of his ancestors and the white elephants were put in stables and lacked attention—at least, so I have been told. He died a young man. But Buddha is honoring the new king, and the birth of this elephant proves that the new king has great merit. I have heard people say he was unworthy because no white elephant was born, but now here is the proof of Buddha's favor. Who dares doubt now?"

THERE was a murmur of approval when the old man finished speaking. After waiting a few moments the spirit doctor continued:

"Some time ago Nai Som-er-fee told me that there was no significance in names. He told me that I was not wise simply because my name Panya, means 'Wise'. Perhaps he will say that Bua Kam—Moon-white Lotus—the name of the mother elephant, has no connection with giving birth to a white elephant. Perhaps he will say that Nai Boon, the rider, is not lucky although his name means luck."

"I am indeed lucky, Nai Som-er-fee," said Boon, his frank young face all aglow

and his eyes shining with excitement. "Princes and nobles will come for the elephant. A hundred of the greatest tuskers in Siam, richly decked with gorgeous howdahs or gold embroidered trappings will escort the white elephant; and I as the mother's rider will be envied of all. The king will give me a uniform and maybe presents of silver and gold."

"We shall go to see this calf and determine whether it is a white elephant or not," said Sommerfield. "One look is better than many omens, Nai Panya."

"*Bai; bai!* Let's go; let's go!" shouted the men in chorus, but Boon interrupted.

"Nai Som-er-fee, I met a man who was on his way to the temple. I told him the news and asked him to send the priests here as soon as possible. Would Nai be willing to wait for them?"

Sommerfield was eager to see the ceremonies that would be performed, and assented.

"The priests are necessary," said Panya. "We shall all do obeisance to the young elephant, and then the priests will say prayers for his health and wisdom. When they have finished I will chant incantations to drive out all evil spirits that may hurt him or cause him to become sick. Every care must be taken for his health, else we may be severely punished by the king. If he should die before he gets to Bangkok, we would indeed lack merit. The king will wreak vengeance upon every one of us. It is an honor to have a white elephant for the king, but to have a dead one is disaster."

IT WAS not long before the priests entered the clearing. They came in single file with the old patriarch of the temple leading the procession. Immediately behind him was an acolyte carrying his elaborately embroidered ceremonial fan, haversack, and betelnut box. Behind these came four other priests with acolytes carrying their ceremonial equipment.

A group of novices dressed like their seniors in brilliant yellow robes came next. Last of all came the villagers, men, women, and children, all in their holiday attire. They made a colorful picture, with *panungs*—trousers—and *pasins*—skirts—of every color of the rainbow. Many of them carried great silver bowls filled with scented water and sweet smelling flowers. The priests were given the place of honor in the group, the men mingled with those present, while the women and children formed a second group a little distance away, but close enough to hear the conversation.

While the new arrivals rested, Nai Panya told of the omens he had noticed, and then Boon described the young elephant.

"*Bai,*" said Sommerfield, when they had had time to rest.

"*Bai,*" shouted the men, and off they started with Boon leading the procession, Sommerfield next, and the others following in the order of their rank. Boon took a trail leading to the stream, crossed it, and headed for the salt lick about a mile from camp. He skirted the clearing and started up the ridge behind it. It was broiling hot, and the villagers straggled up the path, panting. Through the trees could be seen the outline of Bua Kam, the mother elephant. She had heard them coming and was headed in their direction.

"*Tinee dee quoi.* Here is better." said Boon.

The crowd protested. They wanted to see the white elephant. They had not come to look through the trees at the head of an old one.

"She is in a very bad humor," exclaimed Boon. "She almost charged me this morning when I went close."

An argument followed. It was settled by Sommerfield, who announced that he, with Panya, Boon, and Kow, the headman of the camp, would go closer to determine whether or not it was really a white elephant.

The four started forward quietly.

Boomp!

Bua Kam slapped her trunk on the ground so fiercely it sounded as if some one had broken the biggest drum in the village temple. The four stopped short. Behind them they could hear the frightened cries of two or three children.

"*Mai dai.* It can't be done," whispered Boon.

"*Dai!* It can!" insisted Sommerfield.

Boomp! warned Bua Kam.

CAUTIOUSLY Sommerfield made his way through the undergrowth. Boon was right behind him, but the other two kept timorously to the rear. Bua Kam continued her warnings until Sommerfield was within ten yards of her, and then let out a nasal shriek.

Through the bushes before him, Sommerfield could see the little clearing that Bua Kam had trampled down. In the shade of a tree lay the calf. It was of a pale red color and seemed to be covered with light fuzz. Its toenails were white and there were five on each hind foot instead of the customary four. On its tail the larger hairs stood out, white and stiff. The eyes were closed so it was impossible to tell their color; but whether they were black or pink made no difference. The calf was an albino—a white elephant, a representative of Buddha, the indubitable warrant of a favored king.

"I think he needs water," whispered Sommerfield. "See how he is panting."

"Yes, water. He has no water. God Buddha, he has no water." Boon's whisper was hoarse as if he also needed water. "We must bring water. Here on the ridge there is no water and the little one can not walk down the steep hill. She can not carry him and will not leave him to get water. God Buddha! If he should perish!"

Like a wild animal he darted noiselessly through the bushes to the place where the priests were waiting. When Sommerfield arrived, a prayer service for the little elephant was in progress. Seated on a decaying log, his ceremonial fan before his face to prevent thoughts of mundane things from creeping into his mind, was the head priest. On the ground before him with elbows on the ground and palms together in the attitude of prayer, were the brown villagers. Heads were bowed low to the ground or thrown back with faces uplifted to the leafy dome made by the great jungle monarchs whose branches spread out between them and Nirvana.

Prayer after prayer fell fervently from the shriveled lips of the aged priest.

When the priest had finished his pleas for the mercy of Buddha, Panya, the spirit doctor, took charge of affairs as naturally as if it were a part of the same service, as indeed it was. The priest saw nothing incongruous in it. Why should the people?

But Panya's tactics were totally different. His was not the attitude of a suppliant coming to a greater power for help. He stood before the spirits of the jungles with shoulders back and head up. He called them by name, dared them to lay so much as a finger upon him who was their master. He reminded them that the spirit he controlled was greater than they, singly or collectively. He recounted his marvelous deeds and threatened to bind them and tie them for eternity if they did not accede to his will.

He ordered all spirits of disease and insanity away from Bua Kam and the white elephant. He called in the thirty-two good elements which are necessary to the health of men and animals alike. Spirit after spirit was called upon and ordered to perform certain duties.

The angry bellow of an elephant broke through the stillness of the jungle. It was not Bua Kam. It was from the opposite direction. The animal trumpeted and bellowed again. The confident, haughty expression on Panya's face seemed to be frozen there. He stared incredulously in the direction of the noise. Some jungle spirit was evidently disputing his authority.

The crowd was in a panic. They could hear the *crash-crash,* as the elephant broke wildly through the jungle. There was another trumpet. With one accord they started down the steep path toward the salt lick. Men and women dropped the silver bowls and spilled the scented water which they had brought to sprinkle on the sacred animal. The smaller children were swung up to their elders' hips and carried off in the rush for safety.

The trumpeting was closer. Panya was among the first to seek shelter.

Sommerfield caught a thick vine that hung from the branches of a great teak tree and made his way upwards. Boon was right behind him. Halfway up, Sommerfield stopped to laugh. The situation was in a way ridiculous. He had had many experiences with elephants, but he had never before been forced to climb to safety twice in the same day. After all, it was a pleasant interlude in the dull, monotonous routine of jungle life.

THEY were well concealed in the dense foliage when the elephant appeared.

"Paa Luang!" gasped Boon. "It is the *chow's* elephant. If he does not follow the people he will kill the white elephant. He has attacked every elephant he has found since he went on *must*. We have no merit. We have no merit."

"You are right," said Sommerfield to himself. "We have no merit."

He had not allowed himself to count too much on the change in the company's fortunes that would follow the advent of the fetish, but he had felt a peculiar exultation when he had satisfied himself that the calf was actually an albino. Why should hope be dangled momentarily before his eyes and then snatched away?

From his high perch Sommerfield saw Paa Luang crashing through a clump of bamboos. He was one of the largest elephants Sommerfield had ever seen. He was a stately beast that would make a wonderful showing in a procession; but his tusks which were four feet long, curved inward, so that they almost touched at the tips. They would be in the way of an elephant working with teak logs, but for show they were splendid. Long black streaks of oil oozed from the *must* holes above the elephant's eyes.

The elephant trumpeted again. An answering trumpet was heard. Boon clutched Sommerfield's arm. That trumpet was not from Bua Kam either. It was too far away. The tusker stopped in his tracks, cocked his ears, and felt the air with his trunk. He trumpeted. It was answered. He bellowed and kicked up the ground with his front foot. His challenge was again answered, and Sommerfield could hear a crashing of trees in the direction of the newcomer. Paa Luang with another growl, charged through the jungle in the direction of the white elephant.

"Boon, your knife," whispered Sommerfield. "Throw it. Stop him."

As the tusker passed under the tree, the rider drew his heavy jungle knife from its sheath and hurled it at the animal's head. The aim was good. About six inches of Paa Luang's scalp was opened to the bone. Paa Luang ducked his head, hunched his shoulders, and backed. As he started forward again, Boon hurled a dead limb which checked him a second time.

"Back, worm!" shouted Boon, but a trumpet from the other side of Bua Kam held the elephant's attention. He trumpeted and charged.

The head and shoulders of Father Eclipse of the Moon broke through the jungle around the clearing in which the young calf lay. He passed the mother elephant without seeming to notice her and rushed on to the fight.

With heads up, trunks curled tightly between their tusks, ears fanned straight out from their heads and tails held high and stiff, the two tuskers rushed at each other like two locomotives under full steam. Their heads dropped low and came together with a reverberating bang.

It seemed that one of them would certainly be stunned by the impact, but both went at the fight as if nothing has happened. Each animal strained and pushed as he grunted and roared. Round and round they went in a circle. Paa Luang's tusks were longer, and although he could not get them to the sides of Father Eclipse of the Moon, he did rake them back and forth across his chest. Moon's shorter tusks could not reach Paa Luang so long as they kept head to head. Both elephants strained with tails high and lashing furiously.

"*Phra* Buddha *Chow!*" murmured Boon.

BLOWING, grunting and bellowing, the two elephants struggled. At first neither seemed to be able to get an advantage, but Father Eclipse of the Moon was stockier and could use his weight with greater effect. Gradually Paa Luang lost ground. With a tremendous effort Moon pushed him back a full foot. At the same time Moon ducked his head and disentangled his tusks which had been straddling the long slender ones of his foe. As quick as a cat he twisted his head to the left and sank his right tusk into Paa Luang's tough chest. Before the *chow's* elephant could take advantage of his own unprotected side, Moon's head was back and their tusks were interlocked. At that game, Paa Luang did not have a chance. His tusks curved together and were so long that only at an angle could they do effective damage.

Again they struggled in a circle with heads lowered, straining and grunting. Again Moon tried to slip past his opponent's guard to make another thrust, but Paa Luang lifted his head suddenly to keep the short tusks from slipping free. So suddenly did both elephants move and so fierce was their attack, that the long, slender tusks of Paa Luang were broken. Two stubs remained, one a foot long, the other over two. The ends were jagged and sharp.

The maneuver had disengaged their tusks. Moon, with his head below Paa Luang's, lunged forward for a deadly thrust, but the short jagged tusk caught him between the eyes and tore the skin from his forehead and raked it back between the ears. The heavy skull had protected his head, and Moon had sent a second thrust into the massive chest. As Moon drew back for a second lunge, Paa Luang backed and dropped his head to the defensive. Again they maneuvered in a circle. Bellows of pain mingled with those of rage.

Paa Luang became desperate as he felt himself being pushed back. He exerted every ounce of strength in a supreme effort. Moon went back. His hind feet struck a decaying log and he faltered. Paa Luang was upon him in a flash. Moon struggled to maintain his balance. Paa Luang caught a ragged tusk in his shoulder. He thrust again into Moon's right side, and was making a third jab as Moon regained his balance and whipped his hind quarters to the left. Paa Luang's jagged tusk raked Moon's leathery side.

Like a demon Moon tore into Paa Luang's unprotected flank. Once, twice, three times, Moon sent his tusks home. Bellows of pain echoed through the jungle. Then they were head to head again, tusks locked and heads lowered.

Moon's thick tusks were now between his enemy's broken stubs. With a tremendous effort he forced Paa Luang back. He shoved again and suddenly raised his head. His tusks fitted closely around Paa Luang's neck. Moon seemed to expand upward. Both elephants' forefeet were off the ground. Still Moon was coming forward. Suddenly he twisted to the right. Paa Luang was unbalanced and fell to his side. He did not move. His neck had been broken.

But Father Eclipse of the Moon was not through. Time after time he thrust his tusks into his prostrate foe, stamped on him and knelt on him and stamped on him again. He seemed controlled by a demon. He was even more savage than during the fight.

Bua Kam gave a quiet, coaxing call. He stopped suddenly and faced her, bleary eyed and wild. She approached him fearlessly. The call was repeated. She slipped her flexible trunk over the wound on the fighter's head and seemed to tickle his ear. Father Eclipse of the Moon, swaying and heaving from his exertions, looked at her with dull, stupid eyes. The quiet coaxing sound was repeated.

Bua Kam turned back to her calf and ran her trunk over his little body as if caressing him. She felt the dry, panting mouth. Father Eclipse of the Moon followed. He too ran his trunk over the little form, but he did not seem to be caressing it. It was more as if he were trying to decide just what it was. Bua

Kam stepped gently aside as Father Eclipse of the Moon slipped his reddened tusks gently under the calf. With his trunk across the little animal to hold him firm, Father Eclipse of the Moon lifted him from the ground, held him high in the air and slowly, with Bua Kam at his heels, started down the ridge, down to water.

Neither Sommerfield nor Boon moved for some time. Finally the words "*Phra* Buddha *Chow*" slipped reverently from the native's lips. As Sommerfield reached the ground, he noticed Panya, the spirit doctor, waiting for him.

"Did you see, Nai Som-er-fee?" asked Panya.

"I saw," replied Sommerfield.

"It was Buddha," said Panya. "The strength of Buddha broke the rattan hobbles when Father Eclipse of the Moon tried to get away. It was Buddha that brought him here to protect his white elephant. It was Buddha that gave him the strength to win. The king has great merit."

FREE WOOD

By Leonard H. Nason

A GREAT many houses in the Basque country of France have been built with what looks like second hand lumber. The beams of the ceilings, the supports of the barns and the balconies that are the feature of every Basque farmhouse all show signs of having been used before.

To the average observer this would mean nothing except that the Basques were a thrifty race and had probably built their houses from the wreckage of former habitations. Once in a great while, however, some visitor to the Pays Basque discovers that these massive beams in the ceiling, these gigantic corner posts, are ships' timbers.

The beams of the ceiling are mostly stringers, easily recognized by the scars of doweling and notching where the frames were attached. In the center of the room is usually a strake or a huge, two foot square timber that has served some vessel as keelson. One never sees knees, those natural wood angles that are used to support the deck. This is explained by the fact that at the time these houses were built the shipbuilders were accustomed to use heavy ledges instead of knees, maintaining—and perhaps rightly—that these ledges added to the longitudinal strength of the ship.

Whence came all this timber?

The writer set himself to find out. The writer likes to talk to Basques, because they speak very wretched French, and so does the writer. Well, then, after a great deal of asking, the writer found a Basque who thought that he, the writer, was English, and wishing to insult him, said that the beams came from captured English ships. This was passing strange. The histories make no mention of the French taking enough English ships to furnish the entire department of Basses Pyrenees with houses.

The Basque swore that it was so. He said that in the Napoleonic wars a man lived in Hendaye who was a great sailor. This man's name was Pellot, and he was alive in 1850. He defeated the English in fight after fight, and brought so many prizes into Saint Jean de Luz that the authorities forbade him to bring any more.

It is said that a man could walk from Ciboure to Saint Jean across the bay, a distance of over a mile, simply by stepping from one deck to another. It is these ships that were broken up and distributed piecemeal to any one who would cart them away, and their bones were put into the supports of farmhouses.

THE ICE GOES OUT

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

A story of Alaska, in which honest men and crooks propose, but inscrutable Nature disposes

THE HAND of winter was on the North country. The sap had not started to run. Valley, stream and mountain, in the grip of the ice, lay like something dead.

And then it changed. Slowly the sun began to swing north, and long before the sap began to run, or the first flight of birds, men began discussing the ice pool.

The ice pool!

Not January 1, but the break-up, marked the beginning of the Northern year. Welch and several others would handle it this year. They had handled it for several years and given satisfaction. The ice pool was the great sporting event that survived. The Nome Sweepstakes and other dog racing events had lost their importance; had dwindled as Nome itself had dwindled. But the break-up each spring was the nearest thing to a lottery that remained under the American flag.

Sometime late in April or early in May the ice went out. Men sent in their money and with it the day, hour, minute and even second they believed the ice would go. Luck governed the contest, for no man could tell the exact hour. The man coming nearest to the moment of the break-up won the pot, less the expense of holding the event.

LEACH spilled the contents of his poke on the rough cabin table.

"Enough," he muttered, "to buy twenty ice pool chances. This year I'm going to win! Each year I've come nearer; each year the pool has been larger, but this year I win!"

"Don't be too sure," Atridge, his partner, observed.

Leach stretched himself and stepped outside. The air was almost balmy; the sky a deep blue; the mountains stood out

sharp and clear. The sap was running in the willows, but then a willow is a foolish sort of tree and frequently buds too soon. The creek on which their cabin was located was frozen down to its gravel bottom. Leach looked into the sky and a peculiar hardness grew in the muscles around his jaw. A flock of geese was flying northward to some open body of salt water. A willow may be foolish, but geese know.

"This year," he repeated, "I win the ice pool!"

Atridge did not speak for several seconds.

"I think," he finally said, "I get you. But don't you mean this year *we* win the ice pool?"

"Yes, if you want to go in on it—fifty-fifty. Otherwise I'm counting on you to keep your mouth shut!"

"I'm with you; what's your plan?"

"We can't lose. I've worked it all out. Last winter when you thought I was brooding and maybe had cabin fever I was figuring to win the pool!"

"What's your plan?" Atridge repeated.

"Easy! Blow the safe in Welch's store and go down the river ahead of the break-up. What chance has the marshal with the whole country flooded. I know of a dozen cabins in the lower country where we can hide out. Nobody will know whether we've wintered there or just arrived. Nobody knows we're here! And we won't show ourselves in the camp."

Like most prospectors he spoke of any thriving town as a camp. Originally it had been a gold camp. From it a town had grown.

They camped on the outskirts of the community a week later. Excitement was on the increase. It was late April and money was coming from every part of the world. From traders and Eskimos in the North; from trappers, miners and business men throughout Alaska to men of poverty and wealth alike who chanced to be spending their declining years in warmer climates. To some it merely meant thumbing a bill off a large roll; to others it meant a sacrifice. Back of it all was the sporting blood of another day prompting them to take a chance; whispering that they had as good a chance to win as the next fellow. Loudly they might declare they knew they didn't have a chance, but the faint voice of hope whispered—

"But, maybe you have."

CON WELCH opened up his place of business to find the mailbox crammed with envelopes. One, larger than the other, attracted his attention. He opened it. A small poke of gold dropped into his hand. With it a note which read:

ICE POOL COMMITTEE:

HERE'S ENOUGH PLACER GOLD TO BUY ME TWENTY CHANCES. I'M GUESSING THE ICE GOES OUT AS LISTED ON THE ACCOMPANYING PAPER. I EXPECT TO WIN THIS YEAR, SURE. I'M SENDING THIS UP BY A SIWASH THAT I KNOW IS HONEST. MY ADDRESS IS KLAHOWYA LANDING.

YOURS TRULY,
—MACK LEACH.

"From the lower river country, eh?" Welsh mused. Coming by messenger there was, of course, no date or postmark. "Hang it. I wished that Siwash had showed up in daytime. I'd like to have asked him some questions about the lower river country. Well, Leach, here's hoping. Twenty chances will give you the edge on a lot of others, but the man with one chance often wins."

He opened a safe, already crammed with gold dust and bills, added the contents of the poke, entered the name and times in a large book and filed the letter away.

Men were already working on the ice. In the center of the river a tripod had been erected. Just below it a wire had been strung across the river. On the town side the wire was connected to a clock as well as a siren. When the ice moved the tripod was carried against the wire. The clock registered the exact time and the scream of the siren proclaimed the ice

was going. Then the camp went mad.

The last of the entries arrived that day. The contest was now in the lap of Mother Nature.

Con Welch's safe was closed and locked until the great day when the winner appeared to collect. Robbery? The thought never occurred to any one in camp. There hadn't been a theft in years. Escape was too difficult in a land where all movements of humanity must of necessity converge at the neck of the bottle—the steamers connecting the country with the outside world.

No telegraph line reached the camp, and yet, by a curiously circuitous method the miners learned that the ice was beginning to break far up the river. White Horse sent word to Vancouver and a Vancouver radio station broadcasted the news. A local set picked it up. The camp waited. A day or two; perhaps only a matter of hours, and the question would be settled.

A low boom startled Con Welch. He opened his eyes and listened.

"There goes the ice!" he cried, and rushed to the window. The tripod had not moved. He rubbed his eyes and waited. "Must have been dreaming. That sure sounded like ice breaking!"

He returned to the warmth of his blankets and dozed off. At six o'clock his telephone rang. A voice came crisply over the wire:

"Con, this is Kenmore speaking. How much money did you have in that safe?"

"Roughly, twenty-five thousand dollars. Why?"

"She's been blown. Get down here as quick as you can!"

A MOB had surrounded his store when Con Welch arrived. Each man had made his guess on when the ice would go out. Each felt himself robbed of twenty-five thousand dollars. The men buzzed like hornets and they were as greatly aroused.

"I've got a dozen men circling the camp," Kenmore, the marshal, explained. "If they've taken a trail out of camp we'll catch them! Your place ain't so badly wrecked as it looks. The job was done by men who know how to use powder, but don't know much about safes!"

Con nodded.

"Half the men in camp can use powder!"

Even as they talked a deputy hurried up.

"We've found a trail. It ain't much, but they went out over the ice. There's at least two of 'em!"

Twenty men were standing about, ready for the trail and spoiling for a chance to take part, backed by authority. Kenmore picked his men.

"We'll travel light," he announced, "and have others follow us up with grub. We're taking to the ice before she goes!"

They fairly raced down the frozen surface. A half hour gained now was equal to several hours hard work once the ice was gone.

An hour later they caught the scream of a siren behind them. It was a sound that never ceased to thrill them. Other whistles in camp took it up and with it came the ringing of bells and the crack of pistols and rifles.

"I wonder who won," a deputy wondered.

"It won't make any difference," Kenmore replied, "if we don't overhaul the crooks!"

Something cracked ahead of them. They ran swiftly and leaped an opening in the ice. Water began to pour through, spreading slowly over the smooth surface. It would be a tough job, returning. An hour later they reached Boulder Creek and Kenmore threw up his hands and groaned. "They knew what they were doing. Timed things just right. We've got to quit the ice!"

"There's a bend in the river," one of them shouted. "If we cut across it will save something!"

"Lead off!" the marshal ordered.

The roar grew louder. First the explosive sound of breaking ice, then the grinding of millions of ice cakes as the

flood waters lifted the ice bodily and carried it toward the sea. Here it stranded on bars and piled cake on cake until a dam had been formed. There it broke through the banks and relieved for a moment of pressure, while the country was flooded.

They crossed the bend in the river and, instead of the smooth surface they had desired, a churning, ice dotted flood filled the course to the banks. They ran madly, taking turns at trail breaking; helping one another over the bad places. Minutes counted. It was a tossup whether they could cross the flat country ahead before the water flooded it.

They cut across to the stream once more and followed along the bank. Here the river had broken through a low mountain range after ages of effort. Walls were of granite, scraped by the ice of thousands of years. A panting deputy cried out with excitement—

"Look at that!"

ICE HAD choked the gorge and the river was climbing the sheer walls. But in the midst, leaping from cake to cake, were two figures. They seemed tiny, when compared with the vastness of the breakup. They moved with desperation; falling, fighting, each for himself, but working toward the jam.

One man looked up and saw the posse, but a greater danger confronted him. Ice cakes were being sucked into a vortex that poured through an opening in the jam. He judged his situation carefully, leaped at the right moment and was on the jam proper. He did not look back at his companion, but climbed upwards, knowing that if he gained the top and the smooth ice beyond, the posse had no chance; knowing too, that if he failed, the river would demand its toll.

No word passed among the posse as it watched. They knew the ice, these men; knew that the might of the river was exerting tremendous pressure to overturn the jam; knew that in the end the river would succeed.

One of the men gained the top; the other was halfway up. For an instant the leading man was outlined sharply. He waved his hand in defiance and far beneath a cake of ice weighing tons groaned in agony, then burst.

A man in the posse cried out at the drama. The river had won. The whole jam was moving. Cakes and blocks shifted and the tiny figure of a man was hurled into the stream an instant before the jam overturned. Another dot, a thing of arms and legs, fighting a river, remained on top of the shifting ice a moment, clawed for a niche on the bank and then fell back. The river, with its burden of ice moved on toward the sea.

The youngest member of the posse stood where the jam had once held the flood waters of an empire in check.

"Do you suppose . . . ?" he ventured.

"No," the marshal answered, pointing to a spruce log three feet through at the butt. It was a sound timber from heart to bark but it was now a pulpy mass being destroyed by the ice. "The only thing that'll ever be found, son, is the gold nuggets. And maybe the river will keep even them. The rest will be destroyed. Well, boys, let's go back and report. Somebody's out twenty-five thousand dollars."

Eagerness to learn who won the pool spurred them on, long after muscles cried for relief. Near camp, a supply party met them.

"Got the crooks?" one of them inquired, slipping a pack from his broad shoulders.

"No. They've gone down with the ice. Say, who won this year?"

"Kind of an empty victory," the packer replied. "According to Con Welsh's book it was a feller named Leach."

In the distance the ice ground its way to the sea.

Beginning

The ROARING HORN

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

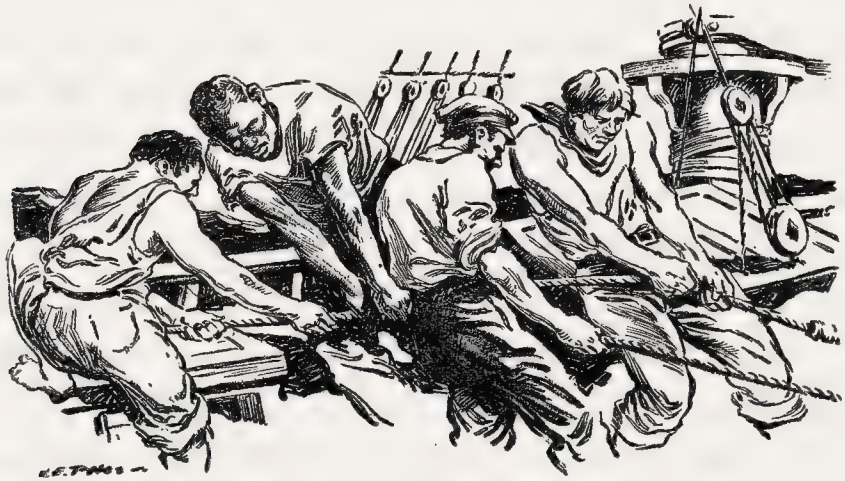
CHAPTER I

TWO BIRDS OF EVIL OMEN

AT JASON MELLISH'S dingy, cluttered desk in Jason's cluttered and dingy office that bleak February day, one old man was sitting with another not so old. And what the two were plotting dipped into crime so monstrous that, even for the love of money, it seemed hard to think men would conspire to such ends. A prime pair they made in wickedness, this old ship owner and this shellback sea captain of the hard fisted, deep water school.

"Done?" exclaimed Jason, in a voice harsh as the rasp of a file. "Of course it can be done! Come, come, set everything taut and shipshape, Bohannon, and take a bingo chance. When there's a little job like this to do, a job with a full cargo of cash in it for your own hand, you're the devil's own boy to do it!"

Bohannon—Captain Isaac Bohannon of the seven seas—leaned back in his complaining chair and with the heel of his calloused hand rubbed bits of plug tobacco in his other palm, for his black pipe. A charged silence hung between the conspirators. For a long moment the captain stared at the window-panes against which drifted the fog of South Street. Only a dull light—for it might have been four of the afternoon—seeped through those grimy panes; but even that cheerless glimmer revealed the office as one of the old type now passing away.



A novel of a condemned windjammer and its shanghaied crew on a tempestuous voyage around the world's worst corner

Pictures of ancient windjammers that once had flown the Mellish house flag hung askew against the walls. On top of an obsolete safe lay tattered copies of Lloyd's Register, from sailing ship days. Two or three half models, a little crude but revealing the love and care of forgotten lobscousers who had used their watch below to carve them, depended from rusty wires. A whale's jawbone stood in one dark corner. And on shelves reposed various dusty curios—a balloon fish, two varnished flying fish affixed to boards, a full rigger in a bottle, Chinese brass gadgets, a pierced metal ball with a lamp inside it, odds and ends of trinkets.

The same bleak, wintry gleam that fell upon these trifles showed Captain Isaac Bohannon as a bull necked bucko of sixty-odd, going a bit bald, with dangerous looking pale blue eyes under bushy and graying brows. The eagle beak of his nose, dented by a scar that wiped across the prominent cheekbone, gave witness to one of his many battles. His thin gash of a mouth twisted a bit as he made speech:

"Yes, I'm the devil's boy to do it, if I mind to. But if we miss stays, there's one hell's flame's long stretch in quod for both of us. Not as I care how long *you* count cell bars. You'd be doing a hundred years, hand runnin', if you got your dues!" The captain's voice was spotted with hostility, as he filled his pipe and fired up. "It's myself I'm thinkin' of," he added, with a huge outblowing of smoke. "No jails for mine, thankee!"

"Clew up!" retorted Mellish, with a pull at his sagging lip, loose over a white bristled and unshaven chin. "Clap a stopper on all that, Cap'n. Don't you go worrying about jails!"

The old ship owner squinted from behind his steel rimmed glasses, which were mended with wrappings of black thread; for in his squeeze penny philosophy a farthing saved was better than two earned.

"Stress o' weather and a rotten, hogged old chump of a ship off the pitch o' Cape Horn—who's to prove it?"

"Never can tell," the captain growled, with sullen smoldering eyes. "Somebody might blow the gaff and bring charges."

"Won't be anybody *to* bring charges! When it's over—"

"Yes, I know. They'll all be to Davy Jones, and gone. That is, if it works

right. But there's sometimes a slip in these little barratry games. They don't always wash. Some scut—God stiffen him!—might make a fetch of pullin' through, and shoot his gab."

The ship owner shook an uncombed head. His gesture was dismissive of peril.

"The long drill round the roaring Horn—that'll take care of all hands!" he mouthed, while his pale lips slewed into an avid twitch. "Come on, Cap'n, don't hang in irons!"

"I might hang in a rope, if—"

"There's no *if* to it! We can always count on ten months o' bad weather, off the Horn. You'll make it by the end of April. Things'll be piping, then. The Horn—she'll take care of everything."

"She might take care o' me, too!" Bohannon retorted with splenetic emphasis.

"How so, when you're safe ashore in Buenos Aires?"

"Ah! You mean? I see! Hmmm, that's better!" the captain admitted, as their two lines of understanding now began to run more in unison. He leaned forward, immense of shoulder in his hulking pea-jacket. "So that's the lay? But, if *I* quit the ship?"

"What's to hinder your deciding you've got to put in at Buenos Aires for repairs? What's to prevent your getting sick there? Fever, or—"

"How can I get sick to order?" demanded Bohannon with some dubiety. "Hell's bells! Never been sick in all my life—exceptin' sick o' ship owners!" The captain grimaced bitterly about his well chewed pipe shank. "And if I slipped some spig doctor a few dollars to certify I was hove down, he'd maybe have me in a clove hitch."

"A man might break a leg, some way," Mellish expounded. "Or get himself hurt, not too bad, if there was cash enough in it for him, eh?"

"Yes, that's so." The captain heaved a deep breath, and smokily brooded. "I get your drift. Well—"

"You're my man, then?"

"I ain't sayin' — yet. Might be, though—if . . ."

SILENCE stretched tensely between the two conspirators, a silence troubled only by the dull rumor of truck traffic on the gutty, drizzly cobbles of South Street, the blurred hooting of steamship and ferry whistles in the river. A dirty day, that, congruous with the business now in hand.

"If what?" suddenly asked Jason Mellish, under breath, eager to reach the marrow of the bargain.

"If what? Why, you dried up bundle o' sea tripe, if you double your offer, that's what!"

"*Double* it! My God, Cap'n!" The ship owner quavered, horribly discountenanced. "Where would I come in, then?"

"As if I gave a hoot in Tophet! I don't care where you come in—except in jail. There's my terms, and I'm goin' to stick to 'em!"

"You're driving a hard bargain, Cap'n!" the ship owner whined. "A wonderful hard—"

"Hard hell!" Bohannon railed upon him. "You're a fine old pirate to be bellyaching about hard bargains, you are!" The glint of some ancient enmity, some perhaps more recent grudge, flicked his pale, cold eye. His fist, tattooed with a blue foul anchor, smote the cluttered desk. "Here you're askin' me to take a rotten old choppin' tray of a skys'l yarder and sail her to the devil, put my own neck in chancery for mebbe a ten year bit in jail, drownd at least twenty-five men—"

"They won't be men, not the kind we'll ship. Only common jacks!"

"Human bein's, anyhow. And I reckon most of 'em wants to live as bad as a sculpin like you! You're askin' me to drownd 'em and lose the ship. And all for why?"

"Partly," answered Mellish, "so you can have ten thousand good dollars to salt away in your pocket, for your old age."

"Stop your gammoning! A devil of a lot you care about my pocket!" the captain flung at him with an objurgation

thereto. "Though if it's anythin', it'll be a fatter wad of money than ten thousand. By the lovely ratline, it'll be twenty, and not a soumarkee less. It's what you're goin' to salt in the bank, insurance money on hull and cargo, *you're* thinkin' about! All right. I'm yours to oblige. But mind now, twenty thousand. And paid on the nail, too, before so much as ever a moorin' line's cast off!"

"Hard terms, Bohannon. Wonderful hard terms!"

"Yes, and this here's a wonderful hard game."

The captain put a curt period to the discussion. He blew thick gusts of smoke.

"Take it or leave it. Go get a better man than I am, cheaper—if you can!"

"Lord bless me, it's extortion! But—well—"

"Done, eh?" Bohannon demanded.

Silently old Mellish nodded; and for a moment silence held them once more, in that dingy spider web where murder wholesale was a-planning.

THEN all at once the old ship owner spoke.

"It's my last job," he declared, rubbing a mottled and veinous hand, toadlike flesh, across the flabby bags of his cheek. "Sink or swim, I'm going to try it. After that, I lay up. It's coming to me, something tidy is—" he sought to salve his conscience—"after years and years of a losing game. I've got to have something to retire on, now that I'm broken down from keel to truck. I can't starve!"

"Not hardly, with all you got laid by!"

" 'Pon honor, I'm a poor man," Mellish affirmed. "For years now, I've been on a lee shore with no way to claw off."

"Have, eh? Why didn't you go into steam, then, like the rest of 'em have, mostly?"

The ship owner sketched a vague gesture.

"Couldn't," he murmured. "Some way, couldn't get a handhold in it. I'm of the old school. The old, windjamming school. The world's passed on and left me hove down, Cap'n. I belong back in another New York and another age o' ship owning."

"Pathetic, ain't you?" sneered Bohannon. "Well, what can't be cured must be insured—right up to the trucks, and lost at sea."

He tamped his pipe with a horny thumb, and added:

"I don't want none o' your guff, not by a sailful I don't. Whether you take your canvas off and lay up, or not, don't make a damn's odds to me. All as matters is business, right now. A bargain's a bargain, and the least said the better."

"You're right, there, anyhow. No long tongues wanted in this little deal."

"We've both got to keep 'em damn' short," the captain affirmed, "to save our bacon. But let's clew up and see the color of some cash! Though I know you fair hate to fork over the rhino. It ain't for nothin' that old Jason Mellish has got the rep of bein' so close he'd sell his grandmother to make sausage skins of her. Cash in advance, y'understand. Let's have a stain o' rum on it, and get to work!"

The old ship owner bent, hauled open the lowest drawer of his desk; fetched out a squareface and two thick, dirty glasses. He poured rum, slopping a little as his hand shook. One glass he shoved toward Bohannon.

The captain spatted his pipe sparkily into the cuspidor and gripped the glass in a hairy, tattooed paw.

"Well, happy days!" huskily said the old man.

"And plenty of 'em!" Bohannon echoed, gulping his liquor at a draught.

The ship owner drank more slowly. A little of the rum guzzled down his unshaven chin and dribbled to his waistcoat, untidy with grease spots reminiscent of slobbered food.

"Ah!" he exhaled, setting down his glass. "That suits me to the ground. Good stuff, a raw day with a thick o' fog, like this!"

"If you weren't so damn' stingy you

wouldn't pay a nickel to see an earthquake," growled the captain, refilling his pipe, "you'd keep a decent fire in that rusty old stove o' yours. Then it'd be better here. But never mind. How," he asked cannily, "how about the c-a-s-h, cash?"

"IT'S NOT for myself I need this maintops'l haul," the shipmaster remarked slowly, confidentially. "There's some one else."

"Is, eh? I never heard tell you'd been spliced."

"I haven't. It's my nephew."

"So?"

"Yes. Man, dear! Ah, there's a lad for you." And Mellish nodded vigorously. "I love that lad, I do!"

The captain's small blue eyes widened. That old Jason Mellish had ever loved anybody but himself, or could love, was news for Bohannon. News of the most amazing.

"My sister's boy," the old man murmured. "Only sister I ever had. She died when he was a baby. He's twenty-six now. A fine figgerhead of a man, you can bet and risk it! If you ever saw an A-1, upstanding lad, it's him. Knows his ropes with the best of 'em. No better cap'n ever took a ship out of New York and brought her back again. Got his papers in sail and steam, too. Clean, square, brave. Knows his work, that boy. Fine navigator. More than half a doctor, too. Smart!"

"He don't favor you much, then," gibed Bohannon, squinting at the ship owner in the slowly fading, wintry light. "But avast talkin' about him. What I want to know is, when do I get some rhino in my fist to bind this here bargain?"

"A fine, clean lad," mused the old man. "It's the sorrow of my life he don't—won't—have anything to do with me."

"Won't, eh? Ah, I think better of him for that, now!"

"But he will, he will, when I've got a good fat bank account to show him. I aim to set him up for life."

"Without," the captain sneered maliciously, "o' course ever lettin' him know where the money come from. And where is he now, this here precious nephy?"

"Wandering. He's a seafaring man, as I told you," the ship owner went on, unpercipient of Bohannon's mockery, "and a rare one, too. Good in both sail and steam. You won't find many like him!"

Something of old Mellish's vulturine expression had faded. Almost a certain softness shadowed his blinking eyes. Strange though it seemed that Jason Mellish could care for any man, the truth outstood that in his withered heart some queer and twisted niche sheltered love for this nephew of his. He leaned back and in fond reminiscence spoke softly.

"He's a rare fine fellow, now I'm telling you!"

"Yes, yes," the captain indifferently assented. "But heave ahead to business! Speakin' about the money, now—the twenty—"

"Went deep water when he was only sixteen," pursued old Jason, "and think of his having his master's papers in both sail and steam! You don't find many like that, his age. If he'd only cruise in and see his old uncle once in a month of Sundays—!"

"Shows damn' good judgment, he don't!" testily observed the captain, pouring himself another drink, a stiffish one. "Twenty thousand for the job, that's what I want out o' you. By the salt sea, yes, sir! In advance, too, every penny of it!"

"I don't know where he is now."

The old ship owner doggedly pursued his thought.

"Last I heard he was chief officer on a Blue Star freighter from Boston to Havre and—"

"For the love o' God, Mellish, stow the gammin' about that blessed nephy o' yours!" Bohannon interrupted, and rammed it down with a stiff oath. "I didn't come here to yarn about your nephy. It's the job I want to talk about. That, and the *dinero!*"

"YES, YES, yes, to be sure," assented old Jason, arousing as if from half a revery. "The job, that's grammatical. Well, then, you know the ship."

"The *China Girl,* ain't she?"

"Yes, that's right. The *China Girl.* Last one I've got, now. Been a good one in her day, too."

"Devil of a long time ago her day was!"

"Maybe, maybe. But she was good once. She's a deepwaterman, all right. Wooden, Bath built three skys'l yarder, fourteen hundred tons. Used to carry passengers, too. Well fitted with cabins for 'em, and—"

"I know. I've seen her, a many and a many a time. Been aboard her, too, in Callao and Hong Kong. But she was parish rigged even then and dirtier 'n a hog. You always did go in for penny squeezin'," Bohannon affirmed, sucking at his pipe. "I won't drill on that part of it, though. Question is, how is she now? Must be pretty rotten. By Godfrey diamonds, yes!"

"Pretty ripe, I'll admit. A trifle unseaworthy," the ship owner answered. "A trifle hogged, as I've said. Framing is weak. But she looks fairly good. Last survey, a fitter I knew put the thing across and didn't look too close. Masts and rigging a bit weathered, but—"

"But she'll make the Horn, at least?"

"Yes. She's not so bad it'd raise any suspicions trying to send her round old Cape Stiff, to Valparaiso." All the keen, buzzard greed and craftiness had returned to Jason's baggy features as he sat there in the dimming light that filtered through the one window obscured by dust and cobwebs. He drummed with knuckly fingers on the litter of his desk. "I can get her clearance papers and fix up the insurance right enough. Get a cargo, too, of sorts."

"Mmmm! She's always been a jinker, though. Ain't she?"

"Well, not so good, for luck. That's a fact."

"Dog luck is what she's had!" the captain asserted. "Chronical black luck. Always leakin', goin' ashore, killin' men. She's been loaded to the hatches with hoodoo, and no mistake. I reckon the only one proud of her is the devil—and you. Same thing. Mind how she killed that man, young feller named Humason, in a blow off Hatteras? Winter of ninety-eight or nine?"

"As I was saying," the ship owner ignored the reminiscence, "there won't be any question—"

"That was a hard case," Bohannon continued. "He got killed on the lower foretops'l yard, as I recollect it. Chain sheet of the lower tops'l thrashed round, looped itself over him, tore the whole belly out o' him, innards and all. Shipmates got him down from aloft, but he went to glory in five minutes. Just been married, too, afore sailing. A damn' bad take. Enough to jink any ship and make it hard to sign a crew!"

"Don't you worry about a crew," Jason assured him, a bit grimly. "I'll get a crew, all right, if you'll go captain."

"I've said I would, ain't I? That is, when I see the color o' your cash! Where is this here precious hell wagon of yours anyhow?"

"Tied up at Pier 7, Stapleton, Staten Island. Been there, grounding on her beef bones, ever since she came in last September from Burma, with jute. Ha'porth of tar and paint will fix her up enough to reach the Horn. After that—"

"Well, let her have it. Mustn't spoil a ship for a ha'porth o' paint and tar. But mind, I'm a hearty feeder!" And the captain vastly erupted smoke. "Even if you're forelayin' to drownd all hands but me, don't scamp the stores. Not for the cabin!"

"I won't. There'll be grub enough to last to the Horn, for you, anyhow," Mellish assured him. "Can't afford to stir up suspicions by not providing everything just as if she was going all the way round to Valparaiso. I'll 'tend to that part, don't you worry!"

"Get your cargo, Mellish."

"Right. I will."

"And crew."

"Yes, yes."

"I'll pick up a few hands myself, too. They'll be proper good uns!" And Bohannon grimaced in a manner intended to be humorous. His scar tautened with that grimace.

> "There was tinkers and tailors,
> And sodjers and all.
> They all shipped for sailors
> Aboard the *Black Ball!*"

he quoted the old sea rhyme. "That'll be us, all righto!"

"Pick as poor trash as you can," suggested Jason. "I'll do the same. Any riffraff will do, just so you can work ship with it. We don't want to sacrifice decent lives."

"Conscientious, ain't you?" sneered the captain. "Well, you're one fine, double riveted, copper bottomed old hypocrite, I'll say! But never mind. When do we sail?"

"Call it about a fortnight from today?"

"Right! And—my twenty thousand?"

"You'll get it, cash in hand, when the tug's alongside. Not before!" Old Jason's eye glinted craftily. "I'm taking no chances of your jumping ship with it, and leaving me on my beam ends. Under the circumstances, I couldn't very well recover."

"You're damned right, you couldn't!" laughed Bohannon. "Sly old barnacle, ain't you? But don't let it chafe you. I won't throw you, by crook. I'm honest, I am! Burn me, yes! And when I'm hired to do a job, I do it. Yes, sir, even if it means sailin' pretty dogfired close to the wind, like this time. And this here job is sure like a winter's day—short and dirty. I'll take my davy on that!"

"I don't know," mused Jason. "What's a few riffraff lives, after all? Too many bums in the world, anyhow. As for the *China Girl*, I'd rather she came to a proper sea burial than have her really get round to the Coast and sell her to the salmon fisheries in Frisco or the timber trade between there and Chile. Or have her cut down to a coal barge or a scow. Besides my needing the money."

"Don't get mushy!" growled Bohannon. "It's the coin you're set on, like iron. Nothin' but. Well, you'll get it, by the Law Clink! Your ship'll get her bring-up at old Cape Stiff, don't worry. She's as good as on the rocks of the roarin' Horn this very minute—or to the bottom. That's all, now. You know where I berth. Now I'll pull away." He stood up, stretched mightily and jammed a peaked cap on his baldish head. "So long!"

"A fine lad to raise money for, fair means or foul," the old ship owner reverted, sagging in his twine patched chair by his desk. "Finest that ever spliced a halyard or cussed a raynick. Worth fifty gutter jumpers—a hundred! If there's a better sailorman on all the Seven Seas than Roderick Tyson, I don't know where you'd cross his hawse!"

Already at the door, Captain Bohannon baused, turned round. His gray and upshy brows contracted sharply.

"What?" he demanded. "What'd you say his name was?"

"Tyson," answered the old shipmaster. "Roderick Tyson. Why? Know him, do you?"

"Er—no. I thought—thought you said Hyson. Well, I'll bear away!" And Bohannon was gone.

The door, closing behind him, left Mellish still engloomed among the musty memories of other and better days.

On the twisty, unclean stairway, Captain Bohannon paused to relight his pipe. The grip of his jaw was very grimly set on it, with the match flame revealing his scarred nose and cheekbone, the hard salience of his chin. As evil a light as ever glinted lurked in his pale blue and dangerous eyes.

"Smash my eternal old bobstay!" he muttered. "Well, by the Law Clink, can you beat that? *Know* him, do I? Well, by God!"

He flung down the match, savagely trod upon it, and with sundry profane mutterings clumped down the stair to mingle with the crowd along the drizzly sidewalk of the waterfront.

CHAPTER II

TO THE S'UTHARD

SNOW, sodden with a gray and pelting rain, spread its dour carpet over the pier at Stapleton. The February day lowered in consonance with the ugly drama now being there begun, as the *China Girl*—her cargo mostly second hand steel rails for the Minas de Juncal railway—put out to sea.

Old Jason Mellish stood near the stringpiece of the pier, watching his last ship clear for what he felt was her last passage. In silence he waited with thin shoulders hunched up, an old wine colored tippet about his neck and chin, his thread wound spectacles blurred with rain. Did any emotion lurk behind that baggy and masklike face, no man could have fathomed its tenor.

There the old man watched, one of a little group of farewell sayers—a stevedore, a couple of roustabouts, even a reporter who was getting a fairish story from this sailing of one of the very last skysail yarders. Unmoved he remained there, thinking:

"That's a proper good cargo I've got aboard her. They'll rack her, the steel rails will. Lord bless me, rack her wonderful hard!"

To his muffled up ears drifted the pluffy coughing of the tug that hauled his ship—how unwillingly she moved!—out toward the gray and rain scourged Channel. Before his eyes slowly passed and faded the black, wall sided bulk, the soaring masts and spreading yards of the old *China Girl*. Silent, he stared, and glum. Even a man like Jason Mellish, may he not find it grips his heart to send a one time gallant ship, at long last, out to her death? And what may his thoughts be, if any thoughts he have for them, about the doomed crew there aboard of her?

Captain Isaac Bohannon, richer by twenty thousand dollars in yellowbacks—money that by hard shifts Mellish had raised for him—stood at the vessel's starboard quarter; stood and glowered in silence at the old ship owner's dwindling figure. Bohannon had received those yellowbacks from Jason's mottled hand, in the cabin, some ten minutes before the old man had stiffly clambered down the gangway ladder.

All the while Bohannon had watched the springs being taken in, forward and aft, the singling of the head and sternlines, and then their casting off, the comfortable bulge of that money in his breast pocket under his rain gleaming oilskins had given him good cheer. With the final "Let go forrard!" and the "Let go aft!" he had felt the last bond severed, whereby any possible loss of that fortune might overtake him. Now the money was his, all his, irrevocably his; and he was rich! Richer than ever he had hoped to be! The hard heart swelled within him; and he smiled as a wolf, perhaps, might smile.

"You'll get your money's worth, you damned old son of a one!" he was thinking as the ship drew away. A very demon of malice gleamed in the pale blue of his eyes. "Your money's worth, and then a lot. If you knew, if you only knew—"

He leaned elbows on the snowy rail, spat into the swirling, sullen water and sardonically grinned.

"You'll know soon enough, by gumbo, but not too soon," the captain's thought continued. "Not so soon that you can stop it happenin'!"

And with viperine relish he fell pondering about a certain letter he had written old Jason; a letter he had left with a friend in Brooklyn to be posted one week later, not before. Thoughts of that letter must have given Bohannon extraordinary satisfaction, for they gendered in his bull throat certain hoarse rumblings that stood him in lieu of laughter.

"You'll be all ends up, old boy, when you get that there letter!" the captain savored his reflections. "A little of the merry hell you're ladlin' out to others, you'll get it in your own dish, eh, what? Hove on your beam ends entire, that's what you'll be. I reckon any score I got against you'll be all paid up. And you'll be paid, too, for your murderin' plot—

paid in full, signed, sealed and delivered. When you *do* know, Man Above! I'd nigh hand give half the twenty, just to clap my eyes on you then!"

Through gray rain curtains, the wharf now was fading from Bohannon's sight. Laggardly dispersed, the little group there began melting away. Still, however, the ship owner stood at the stringpiece, a motionless and muffled figure. But all at once he raised a hand in signal of farewell; not so much farewell to Captain Bohannon as to the old and dying ship, last of his line.

In answer to that signal the captain lifted his own hand and shook it. That hand, though, was a fist. Then turning inboard, Bohannon went below to drink a glass of grog and brood evilly triumphant on the cynic thing that had been done; to gorge his spite by pondering upon the letter predestinate one week from then to shatter Jason Mellish.

UNDER a stiff quartering breeze the *China Girl* toward four bells of the afternoon watch was logging off a matter of seven knots. Flurries of wintry rain whipped a gray heaving and moderate sea that cradled the old *Girl* as if to lull her for her final rest.

Doomed though Bohannon meant her to be, still he had had her put shipshape. Under the hard fisted persuasion of the mates—William Furlong and Peter Mayes—the waterfront scrapings which for the most part comprised that scurvy crew had been kicked and cuffed, horsed and pushed and rustled about from station to station, to bring matters into some semblance of order.

Even while still in tow, this work had been going on. And by the time the tug had dropped her off Ambrose Lightship the *China Girl* had begun to assume a certain air of reputability. Much had been to do; all loose objects on and around the decks to be secured for sea, gear coiled down and made all clear for running.

Out of the sixteen men rated as A. B., hardly more than half knew one end of a ship from the other. Even in cleaning up decks, stowing away the hawsers and making the anchors fast with sea lashings, the intelligence of many had been overtaxed; hence, oration of no gentle tone from Furlong and Mayes. A lubberly gang of canalboat sailors, that!

All thumbs though some of the complement were, still they could pull and haul after a fashion when the gear was put into their hands. And presently out of chaos emerged a certain kind of order. This, despite the fact that some of the haymakers were already seasick and not only got in each other's way but also in everybody's else.

With tongue and fist the mates drove them, waking up their crowd of shiners with a will.

"Come on now, lads. Masthead that yard! Walk away with them halyards!" And hesitantly the ponderous yards inched up the masts, with complaining blocks and creaking parrals. Yards were trimmed, sails sheeted home and gear coiled ready on pins and rails. Two or three of the clumsiest farmers had to be manhandled for not jumping quickly enough, but no great damage was done. Captain Bohannon on the poop, meanwhile, watched with some ennui the scene all too familiar through years of having witnessed such in "wind wagons" more often disreputable than not.

At last they got the *China Girl* under topsails and courses, and finally set the maintopgallantsail.

"That's about all she'll carry," the captain opined; and so for the present they let it go at that.

ALL HANDS were mustered aft as soon as the gear was reasonably shipshape. A sorry looking company indeed they were, take it by and large, as they lined up. A tough crew—wharf rats, waterfront bums, wastrels, pierhead jumpers. It seemed quite obvious that some had left their countries for those countries' good; the countries being several. Some had come aboard without sea chests or dunnage bags,

having naught but the generally ragged clothes in which they stood and shivered. Others possessed a few rotten "slops" that had perhaps one time belonged to sailors now dead and had been foisted upon them by shore harpies. Nearly all were stony broke. The boarding masters and Bowery doggeries had seen to that! Some seasick, others with "hangovers" from having been recently three sheets in the wind, on bootleg, a miserable gang they stood there shuffling on the snow slushed deck, growling and cursing to themselves. Unshaven and grimy faces, foul teeth, rum bleared eyes—as an ensemble of human ugliness, a fine picture!

Captain Bohannon addressed them from the break of the poop. His words were few, but pithy.

"You sons o' sculpins, listen to me! Some o' you never been off soundin's and don't know deepwater law, mebbe. So I'm tellin' you. I've washed my face and hands in a bucket o' sea water and by that token land law and all is left behind. I'm the whole sea breeze, now; the full sail and the double reef, all in one, and *you* ain't thumb high to a flatfish! Get me? If any o' you cockabaloos got any contrary notions, don't try 'em aboard *me*, or I'll come across rugged and you'll damn' soon find the wind took out of your sails, entire. I'm ridin' this one, and you can lay to that, solid! That's all, and that's enough!"

Having said which, Bohannon turned and went below for still another glass of grog.

THE MATES, on whom devolved the duty of choosing watches, eyed askance their bewildered and booze fuddled raw material.

"Damn' few lobscousers we got in this lot, I'm thinkin'," remarked Peter Mayes. Second mate, he; a black Liverpool Irishman, short and bowlegged; a hard and accurate hitter with belaying pin or fist. "Good thing we got a cat aboard, even a dirty alley cat, for a mascot. Sure, we'll be needin' one!"

"Great gang o' farmers, all right," assented Furlong. "Even if most of 'em wasn't still beered up, carryin' cargo, they wouldn't know the truck from the kelson. 'Bout all the seamanship they got is to know block an' fall booze when they see it, drink it, walk a block, an' fall. But we'll make 'em into proper shellbacks, you can bet an' risk it! We'll learn 'em or we'll kill 'em, by God!"

Thus spake William Furlong, first mate of the *China Girl*. A six foot six, red headed man mauler was Furlong, with a countenance rendered even more sinister by a bullet wound on the left cheek. He had got that wound in a savage mutiny some twenty years agone off the coast of Sumatra.

The bullet had stopped in his mouth, after having knocked out two teeth. He had spat the bullet into his hand just before having, with his naked fists, killed the mutineer who had fired it. Ever since that day the nickname "Lead-spitter" had clung to him. The wound had puckered in such a wise as to draw his lip into a perpetual snarl. Even in his calm moods, which were few, Furlong, looked as if about to commit homicide. Now his snarl revealed carious teeth as he repeated—

"We'll learn 'em seamanship, by God, or we'll kill 'em!"

"Hell of a gang o' haymakers to take a ship round old Cape Stiff!" commented the boatswain.

Anthony Saltash his name was and by birth a P. I. That name and his long seafaring had given him a monicker less printable than accurate, usually with the adjective "old" prefixed. And a real old salt he was, for all his seventy odd years; tough as pig iron, well dusted by weather and wind, a barnacle from heel to head.

Now as he stood there, a squab figured oldster in knee boots, reefer and peaked cap, he sorrily surveyed the crew.

"A healthy lot, the body bulk of 'em," he appraised, "but they'll be healthier afore we're through up wid 'em, or dead!" And he worried at his stringy gray mustache. "Turnpikers!"

"Ain't above half a dozen sailormen

in the lot," complained Peter Mayes. "Damn' town rats. Look a' them dagoes an' Dutchmen! Nigger, too! An' if that one there ain't a Rooshian Finn, I'll eat my sou'wester. Everybody knows the kind o' luck a ship carries with a Finn aboard. Sure, that's nigh worse 'n a preacher or a woman!"

"Barrin' that gammy foot Newf'undlander we got to the wheel, now," Leadspitter judged, "and a few more, I'll be tarred if the lot of 'em is worth the powder to blow 'em to hell! How in blazes we ever scraped up a bunch o' sodjers like this gets me!"

"Same here," Mayes agreed. He spat a great deal of tobacco juice over the lee rail, now—as the sails were drawing well—inclined toward the gray, smooth seas boiling past; then, after a pause, "That feller in the focsle, him the Old Man had brung aboard last night, all barreled up, sure, I wonder if he'll be any good?"

"Looks like he could hand, reef and steer," Leadspitter opined. "Looks like a good sailorman from truck to toes. A complete hand, I'd call him. A grand built, fine grown young feller and a blue water man, or I'm no judge. Soon as he gets on an even keel we'll turn him to and soon see, by Judas Priest!"

"Hope he comes out o' his square bender afore long," the Irishman remarked. "We need good men, worse 'n I need a drain o' rum this blessed minute—and that's bad enough, Lord knows! Work enough to do and a plenty." He glanced aloft at the swelling belly of the maintopsail. "Well, we'll preach the boot and belayin' pin gospel to 'em, all right. We'll convert 'em, or sure, nobody else'll never have the chance to. Now then, here goes to choose watches, eh? An' a sweet, proper job it'll be, at that! Jumpin' Jupiter, yes, sir!"

SOMETHING more than an hour later, with the *China Girl* heeled well over on a south southeast course and with the rain abated to a penetrant drizzle, the young husky of their discussion dragged himself out of a bunk on the starboard side of the forward deckhouse, which served as a forecastle.

For a few minutes he sat on the bunk edge, elbows on knees and head between hands, in the dazed anguish of the torment that throbbed his temples. Vague and cold light through the deckhouse ports showed him as a rather heavy shouldered man in patched dungarees and worn down jackboots. It revealed his crisp set, chestnut hair, tousled all awry, and—on the crown—blood stiffened. But of his face, hidden by well corded hands, nothing was visible.

Some few dim figures lolling in bunks or on the wooden benches at either side of the table cast hardly a glance at the sufferer. Incurious in their misery, they left him to his own.

Presently the man perceived the slow roll of the ship, the slithering whisper of the sea. Mustering at least enough strength to look about him, he blinked with bloodshot eyes, saw his mates, their dirty canvas dunnage bags, a sea chest or two, dingily battered. His forehead knit in webs of puzzlement.

"What ship's this?" he demanded in a dry, hoarse voice barely louder than a whisper. "What's her name and where bound?"

No one answered. One of the men there present was a St. Pierre-Miquelon Frenchman who had scant English. One, a Swede who had little more; a third, the Russian Finn, constitutionally silent. Then there was a weasel faced Cockney, sucking at a limp cigaret; and near him a stolid, beaky nosed old German, his cropped hair gray as a badger, hands blue with tattooing, chin fringed with a stubble of white beard. A lumpish, cross eyed negro blent with the deeper shadows of the forecastle. Only one man of all this flotsam appeared to take heed of the sufferer; and this one was perhaps most unprepossessing of all—an East Side gangster and gunman, now nursing bruises recently acquired.

This gangster had found it prudent, after a Chatham Square battle, to stand

not upon the order of his going but to go at once. Fate had led him to Stapleton. The *China Girl* had offered a haven of refuge. He had made shift to stow away aboard of her; but so clumsily that, hardly half an hour after the watches had been chosen, Leadspitter had discovered him. Hence these bruises on "The Dodger", as was his elegant title in his own world.

"What ship and where bound?" repeated the man with the bloodied poll.

Still no reply.

"Well, are you all deaf and dumb?"

The Frenchman shrugged indifferent shoulders under his striped "gansey". The Finn lighted a pipe of willow wood ingeniously carved, yawned with yellow fangs and fell a-smoking.

"A fine bunch of swabs you are!" the sufferer gibed, sweeping them all and severally with his contempt. "If I had you aboard o' my own ship, I'd soon have something out o' you!"

"Ah, don't get shirty!" the Cockney retorted. "Gorblimey, it's only another billet in sail, an' wot odds where to? Too soon to be funkin' it, mytey. We all got to stick it now!"

The shanghaied man blinked stupidly at the Londoner, half seeing a pale face with reddened eyelids and with a sickly corn colored wisp of mustache. Then he perceived a water bucket on the table, and his eyes brightened. Water! Ah!

He got up unsteadily, staggered a bit—for he had not yet got the feel of the ship, the slant of the deck—and seizing a tin cup drank deep gurgling draughts. He drank still again, with the greedy thirst of fever.

" 'Ot coppers, eh?" laughed the Cockney. "You eyn't the only one. Perish my pinkies, no! Well, drink 'earty. Though we'll all need more than water, 'fore we're through with this. 'Cos we're goin' round the 'Orn, that's wot. An' if you eyn't never been round the' Orn, Gawd 'elp you. That's all I got to say!"

"What?" demanded the shanghaied one. "Horn? Round the Horn? No! Impossible!"

"Fact, mytey! An' you can't 'op it now, so it eyn't no use to grouse abaht it an' that!"

"My great God!" gulped the man, and turned toward the port door. "The Horn! No!"

THE BREATH sawed between his parched lips as he jerked the door back, admitting a gust of raw and damp air to the stifling fetor of the deckhouse.

"Hey, you!" snarled the gangster, with a garnishment of oaths. "Shut that door, you poor boob!"

The man turned, with hard knuckled fist.

"Look out I don't shut you!" he menaced.

The gunman's eye gleamed from the shadows, but he ventured no retort. A moment the shanghaied man narrowly measured him with a look that, for all its inflamed pain, held steady; then he stooped out of the house and banged the door to.

"Damned cattle!" he spat. "If I had 'em on mine, I'd clew and cat 'em quick enough!"

Reviving a bit under the stimulus of the fresh, salt edged breeze, he made way to the high bulwark just abaft the break of the forecastle head, and stood a minute looking off to leeward. Little enough information he got there. Boiling tangles of foam, gray rolling surges sullenly fading into mists, told him nothing save that—though how he had come there, not at all did he know—he was already far at sea. Only the immense and primal solitudes of the regardless ocean met his gaze.

"The joke's on me, all right," he muttered. "If I was a booze fighter I could understand it. But—"

He raised a hand to his head. A special focus of pain there, and the feel of clotted blood, wakened nebulous memories.

"Batted me, by gad!" he exclaimed. "Ah, now—"

Vaguely as through these same mists shrouding the Atlantic, some colorable

outline took form, of what must have happened. He recalled having left his own ship, the steamer *Lyndon Castle*, lying at Pier 89, East River. That had been at night; but what night, how long ago, he could not tell. Somewhere at the back of his mind, uncertain memories wove. He seemed to have approached a subway station, with purpose to go uptown to a movie. Then—but though film flickers palely irradiated the dark places of his mind, nothing grew coherent there.

He rubbed his wounded head, once more.

"Batted me!" he growled. "Took me abaft, all right. And maybe dosed me with knockout drops into the bargain. I wouldn't so much mind being capsized in a fair fight, but *this!* Well, by the mighty typhoon, somebody's going to pay for this, that's sure!"

STILL unsteady on his legs—hard-muscled through the dirty and ragged dungarees that now encased them instead of the trim blue he last recalled having worn—he made his way aft. His gait, for all its weakness, revealed him as a sailor. Only a sailor meets the deep sea roll under his boots as he met it. He passed the galley, the sailmaker's and boatswain's quarters and the carpenter's shop, all in the forward house on which a boat lay bottom up. Purposeful was his going.

No one gave him any heed. Two or three raynicks were sweeping, clumsily coiling braces. A couple of the more experienced, with greenhorns to help them and be cursed, were busy lashing spare spars that lay along the deck. Why should any notice him? Dirt and misery, were they not too common aboard the *China Girl* to excite even a passing glance?

With the walk and set up of a true deep water man, he steadfastly kept on. Instinctively he cast an eye aloft. He saw a few men—the best, these—placing crows' nests or pudding bags on the mainstay, forestays and crosstree horns.

"Getting the bagwrinkle on her, he?" thought he, and knew it prophesied a long passage.

The ship, he sensed, was dingy and ill found, with slovenly Irish pennants flickering from her gear aloft, and Geordie patches spotting her canvas. Nothing truly shipshape and Bristol fashion here! Yet, outraged and suffering though he was, still something stirred within him; some recognition of the beauty of mast and sail that not even time's decay and the neglect of man had quite been able to obliterate. Loftily sparred, built on graceful models of old days, the ship still met her ancient comrades, wind and sea, with something of her one time joyance.

The shanghaied man breathed now more deeply as with rucked up hair and smoldering eyes he trod the scarred, foul deck. He passed the main hatch, came abreast of the main fiferail, and still proceeded aft. There, all at once, a harsh voice hailed him:

"Here, you! Where the devil you goin'?"

The man stopped short, peered from beneath contracting brows. He saw a huge, red headed, lumbering figure with a scarred cheek, advancing upon him from the weather side of the big iron watertank just abaft the after hatch.

"Heave to, there! Where you goin'?"

"Going?" the shanghaied man repeated the word. "Going aft, sir."

"What for?" was Leadspitter's summary question.

"I want a word with the captain, sir."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, this ain't no time for questions. Get along forrard!"

The eyes of the shanghaied man commenced to glower in his head. For a moment silence fell, silence save for the thudding swish of waters along the hull, the muffled plaints of the old ship's creaking in the seaway. Into that silence shocked seven metallic clangs struck by the wry leg Newfoundlander at the wheel, followed by seven from the bell stand at the break of the forecastle head—seven bells of the afternoon watch. Leadspitter ordered again:

"Get along forrard, I tell you! This

ain't no private yachtin' cruise, by Judas Priest! You look like a seasoned shell, to me. I don't want no trouble with you when there's so many bloody land crab vermin I got to bust my knuckles on. Get forrard, you, and let's have no rookus!"

"No rookus at all, sir. No disrespect meant, at all. Only—" and his eyes met Leadspitter's without blenching—"I hold a master's license in sail and steam. So you see—"

"I don't see nothin' but that you're answerin' me back. And that I won't have, not from the President himself! I ain't goin' to tell you again, not with words. You get forrard now, or—"

"Mr. Furlong, there!"

AT SOUND of Captain Bohannon's raucous voice the mate turned. He glowered up at the break of the poop, where now the captain stood, pipe in mouth and hands on rail.

"Yes, sir?"

"Send that man aft, here!"

Sour mooded, Leadspitter made a surly gesture. He ordered—

"Come aft here, you!"

Answering no word, but very grim of face, the shanghaied one climbed the port ladder, and like a sturdy son of Anak stood before the Old Man. Leadspitter followed him up.

"You want to see me, eh?" the captain demanded round his pipestem. His pale blue eyes evinced something of the quality of a cat with a cornered mouse. "Well, what say?"

"Yes, sir."

"What about? About your ratin' as an officer? Oh, I heard what you said!" Bohannon's hard slitted eyes revealed cold fires. "I think you're still drunk, by Godfrey diamonds—swizzled and talkin' randoms. By the look o' you, you don't know whether the jib halyards is in the locker or on the mainm'st!"

"I beg pardon, sir, but I'm sober, and—"

"That don't matter a damn's odds, nohow. Drunk or sober, it's all one to me. By the cut o' your jib you're a lobscouser, and that's how you're goin' to rate here. Lemme tell you one thing, and that ain't two. You might rate as Admiral o' the Swiss Horse Marines when you're to home. But you ain't within hailin' distance of home now. You're at sea, signed on all right and proper, and if you value a whole skin and bones, you'll walk chalks aboard this ship!"

"Yes, sir. You're master here. But may I ask a question, sir?"

"Make it short!"

"What ship is this, sir, and where bound?"

"Well, burn me! I ain't in the habit of bein' cross hackled by no sons o' bucks o' forem'st hands—God stiffen 'em!—but I'm feelin' extra good natured today, so I'll tell you. Valparaiso, that's our jolly little old port o' destination, and this here mahogany fitted, nickel plated hell wagon I'm commandin' is the *China Girl!*"

"The *what?*"

"Sir!"

"The what, sir?"

"You heard me the first time. The *China Girl*, of New York and Tophet."

"God above!" Something spun in the shanghaied man's brain. He caught the poop rail. "My uncle's ship!"

"Your uncle's grandmother! That's enough out o' you, now. Go on forrard and sober up!"

"It's true, I tell you! My name's Tyson—Roderick J. Tyson! And my uncle, he's Jason Mellish, owner of—"

"Yes, *I* know!" the captain retorted with a brow of evil portent. "I had a feller once was Napoleon. Another time—but no matter. There here ain't my arguin' day. Your uncle's ship, that's a good un!" Bohannon taunted, while Leadspitter listened with a sneering grin. "By the tail o' Jonah's whale, a proper good un it is, so!"

"But, I tell you—"

"Ah, I don't believe you're even an A. B.! Come on now, let's see if you are, and sober. What's aft on the port side, forrard on the starboard side, and inside o' both sides of a ship?"

"I'm not answering riddles now, though

if you don't know, I can tell you. Lanyard knots of the lower rigging! What I'm talking about now is my uncle, and—"

"Hell's bells!" the captain interrupted, his voice fining down to a snarl of poisonous menace. "Harkee, now!" And he drew a step nearer on the snow slushed deck. "If you ain't got sense enough to save your skin while there's a chance, I'll soon show you what kind of a breeze you've hit, you scruff! All I know about you is two things. One is—"

"But, I tell you—"

"One is, if your uncle was Henry Ford or the Prince o' Wales, it wouldn't be worth a hoot in Tophet to you, aboard o' this ship. Other thing is, I reckonize your face, though you don't reckonize mine."

"You know me, do you?"

"Do I, you skungeon bucket? I'll say I do! Three year ago, I got in a little argument with a cop on Atlantic Avenue, Boston. I fisted him proper, and I'd of got clear with it, too, only for you!"

"*You?* You're the—"

"Yes, I'm the man you tripped up, you son of a flea! I lost part o' my beauty and my cash, too, in the bobbery that follered. So you're owin' me somethin' afore this here voyage is through up. I'm goin' to collect it, too, with int'rest. You give me half a chance, by Godfrey mighty, and I'll knock your skull to jelly for two pins! So now you know. Get along forrard with you, and don't you cross my hawse again, you whelp!"

The muscles of the shanghaied man stiffened. He opened his mouth to speak again, but Bohannon's fist caught him flush on the curve of the jaw, with a crack like the kick of a mule.

Stunned, he reeled backward over the rail. He hung there a second, then dropped to the top of the water-tank and lay inert on the iron.

Leadspitter clumped down the ladder, plucked Tyson from the iron tank, and, while Bohannon sucked his pipe and cursed, dragged the insensible body to the forward deckhouse.

He jerked back the door, heaved Tyson in like a sack of potatoes and slammed the door shut again.

"Round one!" quoth the mate, and dusted off his hands, and laughed.

CHAPTER III

"BOAT AHOY!"

A PLAIN of slow heaving glass, ruffled only here or there by cat's paws, the sea stretched to vague shimmering afternoon horizons of heat. A sea of luminous and melting turquoise that was, of ultramarine and lapis-lazuli, patched with jasper and malachite and golden pulsing absinthe all a-shimmer under skies of glamourous and phantom blue that overarched the undulating play of color.

Under the burnished drench of a merciless tropic sun—a broadcast rain of molten gold—the *China Girl* now lay almost becalmed. There in 53° 8′ West, 190° 14′ North, some eight hundred miles almost due east of Porto Rico, she was making only slow headway. What little breeze fitfully whispered abroad upon the sea was mostly "up and down like a dog's foreleg", in sailor parlance.

Baffling light airs hardly stirred the courses and topsails now hanging from the jackstays, her summer suit that had replaced the heavy weather canvas under which the ship had cleared, and that barely gave her steerage-way. As the *China Girl* rolled gently in the idle swell, her reef points lazily rippled. Sleepy weather.

Captain Bohannon would have done better to have made almost for the Canaries, there to have picked up the northeast Trades, then to have hauled his wind aft and to have driven nearly due south. But he had had his own ideas; and now the ship lay nigh becalmed, to the souring of his temper—were that possible still more—and the sullen weariness of all hands.

Leaning over the quarter rail, Bohannon stood in dirty shirtsleeves and smoked with staccato puffs that betrayed his anger.

"Damn this calm!" he growled. "And this hell's flames bunch o' farmers, too! Of all the beachcombin', lousy swabbies ever I commanded—"

His evil mood was heightened by memories of how that morning, when he had seen Peter Mayes kick Dago Viterbo for working his broom athwartship instead of fore and aft while washing down the deck, of how Mayes had demanded—

"Sure, is there anything under God's blue sky you *can* do right, you burgoo swillin' son of a whelp?"

"I one good paper hanger on de land," Viterbo had most surprisingly retorted. "You like, I do fine job, paperin' your cabin!"

Whereupon Mayes had fetched him a blow that had sent him skirling, for backtalk, and had earnestly assured the son of Italy that the only one proud of him was Satan's own self.

"Of all the bushborn muttonheads!" pondered Bohannon. "Damned haymakin' sons o' sea cooks! Ain't half a dozen A-1 sailors aboard us. All the rest o' these here thick skinned clodhoppers is tarred up with the lazy stick. They'd oughta be kicked to death by cripples, that's what. Quicker I get clear o' this ship and leave 'em all go drownd off the Horn, the better, s'help my God!"

WITH jaundiced eye of spite and venom he surveyed the *China Girl* and the work now going on, for the most part with inept clumsiness. The watch on deck, indeed, was as far as it dared largely doing only "government stroke", which is to say just putting in time; soldiering on the job. Bohannon glowered at Paavola the Finn, now at the wheel, to which from time to time he gave an easy spoke; a pale and sweating figure in the stifle of the wheelhouse.

He regarded with misprisal some of the more expert who were making sennit; knotting rope yarn for spun yarn, making sword mats for chafing gear. Not even the competence wherewith Saunier, the Miquelon Frenchman, and the big red bearded Dane, Tondern, were coach whipping a spare sheerpole, relieved his mood. Evil eyed, he watched them working with canvas, tar, spun yarn and serving board; and as he watched he smoked and chewed curses on all hands.

"Keel hauled is what they'd ought to be!" he bitterly affirmed, his scar contracting as his gash of a mouth snarled up. "God stiffen 'em, the sons o' scaldies!"

No very pleasant ship to be aboard of was the *China Girl*, and that was living truth. From the seams of her holystoned decks stewed and bubbled pitch that smeared the soles, now mostly naked, of all who trod them. A sickly stench of bilges arose from the forepeak. Cockroaches had begun to swarm; and even rats, driven up from below by the intense heat, had commenced venturing furtively on deck. This, despite the ravages of the slit eared and filthy cat which Humphrey Chubbock the Newfoundland cook had fetched aboard in New York, and which now snarled and spat at all with a venomous temper almost equal to the captain's own.

From the galley, while Bohannon watched and listened, a clink of tinware and coppers sounded as Chubbock messed with grub few wanted on the sweltering ship. Chubbock had to labor under difficulties, what of weevily biscuit, salt beef so hard that the foremast hands had nicknamed it sole leather, tea flavored with roaches, rotting potatoes and other skulch.

As Chubbock worked he was singing to himself. The irregular gusts of noise that served him as music suddenly fell silent as he stoked his range. Into that silence issued a sailorman, out of the forward deckhouse. His tough skin, powerful hands, manner of glancing aloft, all marked him as a seasoned lobscouser. The vigorous modeling of his head, his bitter and steady gazing dark eyes, strong beard and rich tanned sunburn made him an arresting figure as, open throated and with muscular bare arms he stood gazing over the tropic sea, searching for any sign of breeze.

In "dog's wool and oakum" singlet and dungaree trousers, with naked feet thrust

into pitch smeared shoes, there he stood and looked about him, yearning for a capful of wind.

"Hell of a situation, this is!" Tyson vented his thought. "Becalmed on this old wagon, when every hour's one hour more I don't get even up with Bohannon and his pretty pair of bucko mates!"

Then he relapsed into a smoldering silence, turned aft and made way toward the galley. Somewhat bruised about the neck though he was, and with a faint greenish purple patch reminiscent of an extensive black eye, Roderick Tyson still made a fine figure of a man. He breathed largely and looked steadily. Though his body was held captive, the heart in him was scathless. Gait and bearing showed none of the shuffle or cringe that some of the other poor wretches manifested. Fight, enough and plenty, still remained in Tyson.

AT THE galley door Tyson paused and with something like a smile listened to Chubbock's song—a mournful ditty about shipwreck and Southern Seas and girls that were left behind.

"What do *you* know about girls, old tindercrack?" demanded Tyson.

"Hello, Roddy!" exclaimed the Newfoundlander. "Dat you, b'y?"

"Who else? And how do the girls fit, with you?"

"Gals fits wid evveryt'ing in dis here world," the cook affirmed, smearing a face brown and wrinkled as an old sickle pear with a cloth that did him duty for a sweat rag, dish towel and all. On his right hand he had only a thumb and little finger, which he used nipper fashion like a crab. "Ever since dem dere Garden of Eden days, if you can find anythin' as stands cl'ar of gals' tarmentin', it's a quare thing. I've had many a hard fuss wid women, I have, man dear!"

"You look it!" laughed Tyson.

"Don't I, eh? Many a hard smack I've had wid the judies. Best way to keep a loose leg is go furrin', an' nivver come back. 'Twas a woman as knocked out most o' my teeth, b'y, and anodder as lost me me fingers. You ain't nivver yeard dat yarn? But I ain't goin' to spin it today!" Chubbock grinned gummily. "Dat 'd take too lang, just now when I got a little spurt o' singin' on me. An' *you* don't need no advice 'lang o' petticoats! I'll take my davy you had pliny truck an' dealin's wid 'em yourself!"

"Blamed little!" answered Tyson, while Chubbock sat down in the galley door on an onion crate so crossed and wired that it resembled an ancient Roman chair. "Women don't mix very well with salt water."

"Right fer you! I nivver seen a woman at sea, yet, as didn't bring on a wonnerful rookus, one way or anodder!"

The cook nodded gravely while Tyson produced a pipe and lighted up. Tyson had got this pipe and some tobacco, with a few shoddy clothes, from the slop chest at extortionate prices, to be stopped out of his pay.

"A martal cold smack is what women allus brings. Knotty wedder dey fetches, an' no coddin' you. Women an' parsons, whistlin' fer a breeze, tearin' a flag, an' a dead carpse in de cargo—dem's ahl t'ings I'd nivver go a-nigh!"

"Go on, tune up again," smiled Tyson. "I'd rather hear you sing than philosophize. You're a rotten philosopher, but as a singer I've heard worse. What about your song?"

"Well, layve me see," Chubbock began. But all at once vibrated a cry—

"*Sail, ho!*"

IT WAS Tondern, the red bearded Dane who, happening to look up from his work at the sheerpole, had seen something afar and thus reported it.

"Where away?" sounded Bohannon's voice from aft.

" 'Bout t'ree p'ints on de stabboard bow, sir. Dat look like a smoke, sir."

"Smoke, eh?" Then, after a pause in which the Old Man located the smudge for himself, "All right!" And silence fell again.

" 'Twas de like o' dis, about my song," began Chubbock; but Tyson turned away,

walked to the starboard bulwark and for a minute stood gazing off in the direction Tondern had indicated.

"What ye make of it, b'y?" the cook demanded.

"Don't see anything but a little smoke."

"Well, smoke or no smoke, what odds?" And Chubbock went on with his culinary labors and his wooing of the Muse.

The smoke continued to increase, to drift on a little easterly fan of breeze that presently began ruffling the sun shimmered ocean.

On the quarter deck Leadspitter squinted with an ugly eye at that far drift.

"She's comin' up thick now, by jolly," Bohannon commented. "That there smoke looks to me like it meant trouble."

"Yes, sir," agreed the mate. "That ain't no steamer. That's a ship afire, or the like o' that. If it ain't, by Judas Priest, I never see one!"

"Get me my long gun."

"Yes, sir." And Leadspitter went down the poop ladder to fetch it.

Back again in a couple of minutes with the biggest telescope aboard, Leadspitter handed it to the Old Man. Bohannon scrutinized the smoke with a certain interest, then passed the glass to Leadspitter.

"See what you make out of it!"

"That's a ship afire, sure, sir," the mate reaffirmed after intensive study. "But she's the devil and all of a long ways off. What d'you think, sir? Stand down for her, and see what we can do in the way of rescue or salvage?"

Bohannon shook his head.

"We got no time to be gallivantin' all over the ocean to pick up fools as ain't got sense enough to keep their ship from burnin' up on 'em," he decided. "And as for salvage, out here, not a chance!"

"Ain't nobody can haul us to looward for not standin' by, and that's a fact," muttered Leadspitter. "No way to prove that's a ship afire."

"Right. There's plenty o' these here soogie-moogies aboard us as'd like to make trouble, in port, but they can't do nothin'. So let the ship burn, by jolly, if that's what it is. Let her burn—what odds?"

By this time a little stir of interest had moved the watch on deck, and such of those below as were not sleeping. Out from the deckhouse lagged a few exhausted, dishevelled men. Hatchet faced Antoon—he had been a taxi driver ashore—and Cultan the "rock scorpion", once a bumboat man at Gibraltar, lounged along the rail, together with Broadfoot the negro, Gorley the Cockney, the Finn Paavola, and Jubal Tabry, he of the gammy leg. Tyson watched, too; and from the carpenter shop looked out the mild, huge mustached face of Chips Solomon Moon. Like Chubbock, Moon was a Newfoundlander. His especial pride lay in the boast—

"I'm a grandfader in seven places; I am, so!"

Now, like the men on watch who stole an occasional glance at the smoke, they centered all attention on that far off happening. With sun dazzled eyes they blinked at the drift of dun vapor that, smearing the southwest horizon, gave hints of some sea tragedy there. Voices murmured:

"Ship afire, wot? Wish to Gawd 'twas this blinkin' one! H'anything for a chynge!" . . . "Gee, that must be a hell of a lot o' good money gone blooey, when a ship burns up!" . . . "Say, if a guy could find a boat with everybody gone off an' left it, like dat—" this from the gangster—"dey might cop a lot o' good hooch an' stuff, huh?" . . . "Oh boy, she sho' am burnin' *some!*" Thus Sam Broadfoot, the cross eyed negro.

BOHANNON now sent Tondern aloft, with a glass bandoleered over his shoulder, for reconnaissance.

"Lay aloft to the foretopmast head," he ordered, "and have a look at that smoke. Let's see what you make out."

From his lofty perch the Dane carefully took an observation.

"Well, how 'bout it?" called the skipper.

"Nuttin' but smoke, sir," the Dane's

voice drifted down through the brazen heat. "Nothin' else in sight, sir."

"All right, lay down!"

"Some poor gozaroos havin' it pretty knobbly, over dere," judged Moon. "Same as we'm like to get, afore we'm to port agin."

"How so?" asked Tyson.

"You, not knowin', an' you a sailor-man?" the carpenter exclaimed. "Us wid a cross eyed man aburd, an' you not knowin' we'm in fer a hard punchin'?"

Tyson laughed.

"Of course," he agreed. "Of course!"

"You might laugh an' you might make a joke on it," Moon affirmed, "but I niver de divil iver seen a ship wid a cross eyed man aburd as could hold a straight course. We'm goin' to have it bad, some o' doze odd times, or I'm 'way off de line!"

"Every ship catches it first or last."

"Right, me son. 'Tis a proper hard life, seafarin'. Ye been follerin' it lang?"

"Quite a while." Tyson fired his pipe.

"Y' ain't ralely de owner's nevvy, is you now?"

"Yes, I am. Straight goods."

"An' you layve de Old Man knock you sinseless off de poop, nigh to hell's alley, an' niver done nothin' about dat?" The carpenter's mild eyes widened. "Howlin' swile cats, me son! I can't fadom out dat!"

Tyson shrugged and rather grimly smiled.

"Only a plain, damn' fool strikes back at an officer, aboard ship," he remarked, in hardly more than a murmur. "It'll all come out in the wash, Chips, when we make port. Don't let's talk about it, please."

THE ELOQUENT smoke banner gradually faded on the far south-western horizon. Still the idlers watched it, sucking at pipes, spitting, lazily speculating who the victim might be; and ever, idly creaking, the old *China Girl* rolled with slow pendulum swings upon the sea of molten emerald and azure glass.

The little easterly fan of air that had sprung up, offering some hope of relief, once more died away. Not even wetted fingers, held on high, could find a hint of breeze. Restive, grumbling, the crew put in a weary time. Bohannon, between nipping rum and cursing, made himself venomously ugly. A few flying fish, flittering aboard, were welcomed by the cat—the only man aboard permitted to walk the poop on the weather side with the captain. Lying out on the martingale, Saunier the Miquelon "Frenchy" reported a pilot fish, believed by sailors to be a sure sign of a shark hanging about the ship. This caused uneasy bodings of a death on board, among some few.

Indolently the off watch men yarned, smoked, talked of wreck and peril, watched an occasional filmy purple Portuguese man o' war trailing its poisonous filaments through the clear brine. The advent of a school of porpoises, leaping with swiftly graceful joy, aroused fugitive interest. Frenchy, having sighted some bonita, came inboard for a harpoon and a coil of heaving line from the boatswain's locker. He succeeded in striking a fairish specimen. But when the meat was tested (as usual with bonita) by putting a silver coin into it, the silver turned black. Wherefore the fish had to be flung overboard, and curses followed it. Had the bonita been good, it would have made a welcome addition to the ship's wretched tucker. For wretched enough it was, in all conscience, and daily getting worse—all save in the cabin.

"The after guard, they're gettin' the good stuff, all right," grumbled hook visaged Antoon, the ex-taxi driver. "Ain't old Abey Buzzard, the stewart, carryin' grub aft every day, we'd give an eye to get a-hold of?" Dully he swore, as the group lounged in the shadow of the deck-house. "Their swill is better'n what we get, cockroaches an' all. Damn' good care o' their guts them bulls aft are takin'!"

"Many a long necker o' rum they're gettin', too," asserted Stackhouse, the man from Maine. A thin scrimp of a

fellow he was, with an interesting cough. "They're drinkin' oh be joyful every day, but not a shoot of it do we get!"

"Slum gullion an' chicory, that's good enough for the likes of us," put in O'Hara, otherwise known as Boston Irish. He scratched a bristly chin with a hand whereon was tattooed a Sacred Heart. "The old hoss we get, sure, it's that hard you could carve buttons out of it an' polish 'em!"

"W'at you expect, anyhow, in a jink ship?" Frenchy asked. "First, she got name of a gal. Dat's bad. Second, she got a cross eyed man aboard. More bad. Worse of h'all, she's kill a man aloft. Kill 'm deader 'n hell!"

"Who—who'd she kill?" asked the negro.

"Feller named Humason. I hear 'bout dat one tam dis ship been to St. Pierre. Shortenin' down, dis feller was on de lower foretopsail yard, an' de chain sheet tear his h'insides out."

"Blimey!" the Cockney exclaimed. "No wonder there's a jinx on this one!"

"An' no wonder, neither, that men mutinizes!" muttered the Rock Scorpion. "When orficers gets sent to Old Nick, serves 'em bloomin' well right, says I!"

THE SWIFT night of those southern seas engulfed the world, the watery world where the *China Girl* lay idly wallowing. Although with every ripple and breath of air they trimmed the yards, still she made barely headway as one more day of her death journey came to its end.

From deckhouse and cabin skylight gleamed vague glows. Binnacle and running lights made three blurs—white, garnet, emerald—in the gloom. A wraith in the star flecked night, Paavola the lookout man lounged on the forecastle head. The spectral, pale eyed face of Karlstad, the Swede, half illumined by the binnacle's sullen glimmer, hung at the wheelhouse window. Dark figures moved along the still hot decks. Voices murmured. From the carpenter shop, around the door of which lounged a few hands on their watch below, issued jerky and strident chords from a consumptive accordion. Noah Landerry, the P. I., rated as sailmaker, was sitting on a wooden bench there. Lanternlight played uncertainly over his gaunt features as he whinneyed out that lusty old favorite:

"In Amsterdam there lives a maid,
Mark well what I do say!
In Amsterdam there lives a maid,
An' she's the mistress of her trade!

"A-rovin', a-rovin', since rovin's been my ruin,
I'll go no more a-rovin', with you, fair maid!"

"Atta boy!" one approved. "Walk back on 'er!" another. "Hayve a'eed wid de rest part of it, b'y!" chimed in a third.

Landerry turned his quid and continued:

"I placed my hand upon her knee,
Mark well what I do say-ay-ay!
I placed my hand upon her knee,
Says she, 'Young man, you're rather free!'

"A-rovin', a-rovin', since rovin's been my ruin,
I'll go no more a-rovin', with you, fair maid!"

As the old sea song proceeded in all its unexpurgated vigor, Leadspitter cursed even such light hearted diversion as this bout with the Muses. His ominous bulk lounged, a shadow among darker shadows, on the weather poop. Leadspitter was hating all hands aboard that night; but most especially was he hating Tyson. The muscular and bare armed shanghaied man, brown and bearded and unafraid of him, filled him with poisonous antipathies.

"There's int'rest runnin' up on that son of a one, all the time," Leadspitter dully reflected, as he spat overside.

To him it was almost a personal affront that Tyson was turning out so well, doing his duty like a proper seaman, offering no occasion for assault and battery. This, certainly, was something of a grievance to the mate.

"If that laddibuck 'd only say somethin' or do somethin', I'd soon preach the belayin' pin to him, s'help my God!" Leadspitter cogitated. "I'd jump down his throat just as soon as hell 'd let me.

I'll learn him a lesson yet. Even if he has got his master's papers somewheres else, he ain't got nothin' aboard o' this un!"

Here now lay the vital point of Leadspitter's spleen against Tyson. The mate felt inimical to all superiority, felt discountenanced and put down by any of his betters. And that Tyson was decidedly one of his betters, not even he could deny. Marlinespike seamanship was about the limit of Leadspitter's ability. But rumors had reached him and well he knew that Tyson was possessed of mysterious mathematical heights whereof Leadspitter knew not even the names.

The best that Leadspitter could do, in finding latitude, was to use the old, sloven way of working with the constant of 89° 48′. Sometimes, as he well knew, such reckoning might put a ship six or eight miles out; and that, on a lee shore in hazy weather, might be an infernally serious matter. "Good enough for a collier," as the old phrase has it, is not good enough for a skysail yarder going round the Horn.

"I got no master's papers," Leadspitter sullenly reflected. "Never can have, all along o' these here damn' fool mathematics!" And then again, "I'll learn *him* mathematics if ever he falls foul o' me. I'll learn *him* 'stronomy. He'll be writin' books about the stars, after he sees all of 'em I got packed in my fist!"

Thus did Tyson's superior knowledge engender viperish hate in the mind of Leadspitter. Thus did the mate dream of vengeance, there on the *China Girl*, which herself seemed a ship o' dreams upon a dreaming sea. And somewhere off there to westward in the night, under the silent, wondering stars, still lay the mystery of what that day had brought to pass.

Toward two bells of the middle watch a timid breath of air stirred the ocean and presently began to breeze on a bit from north northeast, soon hauling more from the eastward. The idle canvas bellied into a white cloud aspiring toward the sky. As the sails filled and drew, the *China Girl* commenced shoving her cutwater through tiny spats of waves now building.

Under the ship's forefoot waters began to curl white; and astern, flecks of evasive phosphorescence gleamed, winked and faded, as if the Milky Way itself had been shaken to a froth of stars. One hour, and with a moderate breeze the old windjammer was on her course again, on into the South that waited to destroy her.

GENTLY reaching along before a fair, following breeze, the old *China Girl* was logging three knots or four. The smoke of breakfast a-making wafted from Charley Noble. Coppers clanked; the scent of even cockroach and chicory coffee gladdened the hearts of men.

Aloft, serving the maintopgallantstay—rotten and perished like much of the gear—Roderick Tyson looked abroad upon the sea of splendors. He knew that despite all this toil, humiliation, abuse, life still was good. His eye caught something, a speck, a far and tiny atom on the ocean off to southwest. At this he squinted a moment, then called down to Peter Mayes on the quarter deck.

"Small boat ahoy, sir!"

"What's that?" demanded the second mate. "Boat, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where away?"

"On the starboard bow, sir!"

Mayes scrutinized the sea, but from that lower position could sight nothing. He went below for a glass. This brought the drifting object into his range of vision. Leadspitter came up, too, a moment later, and took a long look as the ship gradually forged nearer.

"That's a boat, right enough," he affirmed, surly as if the presence of the boat constituted a direct affront to his majesty.

"Sure, that must be off the ship we seen burnin' yesterday," judged Mayes. "Anybody aboard her, sir?"

"Looks like. One man, anyhow. Here, have another sight at her."

"That's right. One man, at least.

Now—he's wavin' a signal. I can see him good."

"Well, reckon we got to run down to him."

"Without callin' the Old Man? Sure, we'd lose all o' twenty miles by pickin' up that feller. We could just fail to see him, couldn't we?"

"Hell, no!" growled Leadspitter. "Not after that whiskered whelp o' misery, Tyson, reported it. There's plenty aboard here, as 'd like nothin' better than to jack us up for it after we made port." His scarred face contracted to a snarl. "We got to run down on her. Damn the luck, I say!"

"And the Old Man?"

"Last thing he said afore he turned in, was not to call him for nothin' short of a typhoon. What's more, I reckon I got authority to shift the course without none o' your lip!"

Leadspitter snicked the telescope shut.

"I'll take this on myself," he decided, and commanded, "Keep her off three p'ints to west'ard! Port fore brace! Shake a leg there, you bushborn cod haulers! Port fore brace!"

The watch on deck jumped to the order, Mayes slacking off the weather braces. So handled, the ship swung round till the wind was abeam on her starboard side, with the yards trimmed accordingly. Thus she stood away toward the vague speck that, alone upon the vast heaving breast of old ocean, broke that immeasurable solitude.

Tensions of interest keyed up all hands. Along the rail dishevelled men leaned, peering. Discussion, speculation waxed keen. That interest leaped suddenly to high intensity when a few minutes later Leadspitter took another sight.

In amazement the mate exclaimed:

"Hell's hinges, what d'you think, now? If my eyes ain't gone plumb bad—"

"What is it, sir?" interrogated Mayes.

"You said 'twas a man, eh? Well, it ain't!"

"What is it, then?"

"What else could it be, if it ain't a man?"

"Sure, you don't mean a woman, sir?"

"That's what I do! A woman, s'help my God!"

CHAPTER IV

A PROBLEM IN PETTICOATS

AS THIS intelligence ran through the ship, disparate emotions came into play. Some of the roughnecks laughed, cheered, even essayed a word or two of ribaldry; for to the run of sailors, as to jailbirds—both being reft of feminine society for long stretches—a woman makes more elemental appeal than to normal free citizens.

Certain of the more seasoned men, though, frowned and shook anxious heads. Picking up anybody at sea, is it not risky business? Chubbock, rich in lore and proverb, muttered:

> "Save a drowndin' man at sea,
> An' he'll prove your enemy!"

"An' a woman, my glorianna!" added Solomon Moon. "A woman an' a parson, dat's bound to be ten times worse!"

Leaning against the batten of the forward main rigging, there in the cutting sunlight, old Solomon voiced his fears:

"I've see bad luck happen a ship, many's de time, from losin' a cat overburd, 'specially a black 'un. Likewise anybody exceptin' de Old Man whistlin' at sea, an' a hatch cover put on deck upside down. Yes, me sons," he crisply declared, "an' I've see wracks alang of hayvin' a draw bucket into de ocean, tearin' a flag, sewin' sails on de quarter deck, an' a hundurd odder t'ings. But de most an' worst bad luck I've see from parsons an' women aburd ship!"

Speaking thickly by reason of his quid, he told of Jonah ships and sailors, and especially how during one spell of long continued, heavy weather, a certain missionary had been adjudged a "jinker" on the *Golden Cloud*, bound from St. Johns, Newfoundland, to Ceylon. One dark night off the Cape of Good Hope, that unfortunate individual had mysteriously vanished.

" 'Twas gave out de pulpit pounder fell overburd," continued Solomon, "but ahl hands knowed he was huv over de rail, an' knowed who done it, too. An' after dat, we had gert time wedder an' ahl lovely. An' a woman, she'm a wonnderful lot worse 'n a preacher. Women bein' ahl as foolish as a she capelin, anyhow, an' bound to get t'ings ahl in a brile!"

"Don't talk rot!" Tyson growled at him, now down from aloft. "You're old enough to know better, Chips!"

"I'm old enough to know women!" the carpenter stoutly defended his position. "De bulk of 'em is ondly made to help men kitch hell! Wid de exception o' women in gineral, De Man Above made few mistakes when He created de yearth. After He created woman, de Book say He rested, an' since dat time, ain't neider God ner man rested much. He'd done a better job if He'd quit afore woman was made, I'm t'inkin'!"

Wherewith old Solomon liberally tinctured the sea with tobacco juice.

The laugh that went round at this bit of misogyny only the more inflamed Solomon.

"No, sir," he indignantly repelled one allusion, "I ain't got a t'ousand wives an' don't want 'em, whatsomever. Women is worse luck 'n a blue painted ship, tippin' over a saucepan, or layvin' y'r old shoes an' clothes ashore. Dey'm de worst luck as *is!* I'd sooner put a match to de divil's tail 'an have one aburd. We got to kape our wedder eye lifted now, me sons, you wait an' see!"

Even aft, anxiety touched Leadspitter and Peter Mayes.

"There ain't no good comin' o' this," the mate growled. "I hate like thunder to have petticoats aboard! This is likely to get the wind of us; bust up discipline, hell bent an' crooked. As cargo, I'd a damn' sight rather carry oil an' dynamite, or quicklime in a leaky ship, than what I would a woman!"

"Same here," Mayes agreed. "This is goin' to put a kink in us, sure as guns. We're liable to go a lee, bad." His black brows contracted; all his short, hard, bow legged figure expressed anxiety. "Sure, 'twould ha' been a good job if we'd gave that there boat the go by, sir."

"Damn' 'f I don't think you're in the rights of it—for once," Leadspitter assented, his lip asnarl. "By Judas Priest, I would have, too, if I'd known. But it's too late now, devil burn the boat an' the woman, too! I reckon," he added on a tone of great uneasiness, "I better go down an' tell the Old Man. As a job, I've seen others I liked better!"

DOWN in his cabin, Isaac Bohannon was at this moment lying stretched out in his berth. Pipe in jaw, he lay there, a scarred, eagle beaked old ruffian of the seven seas. Shirt sleeved, unshaven, sweating and bald, ridged with muscular saliences and ugly as a Chinese demon, he had just wakened from a good kink of sleep and was now indulging in reflections of great and happy poignancy.

His pale blue eyes surveyed the repeating rifle in the rack above his bunk and the two revolvers over the chart table; the chronometer and navigating instruments; the shelves containing his nautical almanacs and tables, "Bowditch's Navigator", and trashy paper novels that at odd times beguiled him. Then they fell upon the medicine chest affixed to the bulkhead, the chest containing no inconsiderable supply of his choicest stimulants. The sight of that chest caused him to smile slightly. His smile widened as he gazed upon the old fashioned iron safe opposite his littered desk. Medicine chest and safe—ah! fine combination. Just now they held much that made life dear to Captain Bohannon.

Without getting up, the captain poured himself a man's size hooker of whisky from a bottle on a chair beside his bunk, and drained it. He wiped his unshaven lips with the back of a hirsute hand and sighed deeply, as one temporarily content with life. To have twenty thousand dollars in one's possession, plus always the possibility of extorting more from a ship owner in due course of time, is not this enough to cheer even a humor as

black as, on the average, was Bohannon's?

"And just what happened to old skinflint Mellish when he got my letter?" murmured Bohannon. Robustiously he chivvied this idea about. "Hope he had a fit and fell in it, the old pirate! When he found out his precious nephy was aboard and going to the rocks o' the roarin' Horn, he must have been a subjeck to be tied—God stiffen him!"

Most delectably Bohannon imagined Jason Mellish, shaken and sick with panic, cabling to Lloyd's in Buenos Aires, instructing them at all hazards and expense to get Roderick Tyson off the *China Girl* before she should clear from that port. Or, still better, the captain figured to himself that even at this very moment old Jason was aboard some steamer bound for Buenos Aires, there to intercept his ship and rescue the one being whom, in all this world, he loved.

"That there letter o' mine, I left with my friend in Brooklyn to be mailed a week after we'd sailed, that's a'ready takin' old Jason all ends up," mulled Bohannon with keenest pleasure. "When he found out he's sendin' Tyson to die with the rest of 'em, he'll go crazy and roarin', by crook! I've paid all my scores aginst Tyson and the old man, too, and then some, eh what? The only thing he loves, on earth—the thing he's doin' mebbe twenty-five murders for—and then the nephy goin' to Davy Jones with the rest of 'em! Crazy and fit to be tied is what the old boy 'll be!"

Bohannon took another drink and with vast contentment sucked at his pipe. Never in all his life, violent and cruel though it had been, had he once consummated a plot of vengeance so coldly malicious, so cruelly successful.

"Let him cable his damn' head off," thought Bohannon, smacking his mental lips over this vengeance, even as he smacked his physical ones over the whisky. "Let him go to Buenos Aires and wait for us. Longer he waits and more he cables, the better. Let him stew! Much good it'll do him, by Godfrey diamonds! I won't put in at Buenos Aires, whatever. No, sir! Not *that* port! We got no wireless; he can't get in touch with us. We'll put in at Bahia Blanca, instead. There's where I'll get hurt, or somethin', and quit the ship.

"So there won't be no news of us, at Buenos. And he'll wait, wait, wait. He'll gnaw his fingers to the old bone, Jason will—go crazy, die ravin'. I'll have the laugh on *him!* I'll have my twenty thousand, and all scores paid. Smart idea, eh? Smart as paint; damn' smart, if I do say it, myself . . ."

INTO the midst of these enjoyable reveries Leadspitter broke with a knocking at the captain's door.

"Hello, what's wanted?"

"Sighted a small boat, sir."

"Have, eh?" Pause. "Come in, and let's hear about it!"

Leadspitter entered, red haired and red necked and generally red with prickly heat and unpleasant emotions.

"I knew you was takin' a caulk, sir, or I'd of reported it sooner. Reckon it's boat off that ship we seen burnin', yesterday."

"Do, eh? Where away?"

"She was off to west'ard, sir. Dead ahead, now. I took it on me—you bein' asleep—to run down to her."

"So? You took a hell of a lot on you, I must say!"

"Yes, sir. But you know yourself, sir, you can't leave a boat at sea." Leadspitter had become unusually apologetic. "If you did, an' some one was to perish, you know what they'd do to us."

"Mmmm! Yes," growled the Old Man, blowing smoke. "But, shiverin' topmasts! We don't want no truck with boats. We ain't in the life savin' business; not much! However, I reckon you done the only thing *to* do. Only, we got all the trouble we want, as 'tis, without—but no matter. How many men aboard her?"

"That's the devil of it, sir. We ain't sighted no men at all."

"What? You don't mean to say you

altered our course just for an empty boat?"

"No, sir. There's somebody into her, all right. But no man, as we can see. It's—fact is, sir, it's a woman."

"A *which?*"

"A woman, sir. A female. Woman, woman. You know what I mean, sir. A she un!"

Chewing a curse, Bohannon swung out of his berth.

"A—*woman?* But, hell's hinges! We don't want no woman aboard o' this one, no more 'n we want the itch!"

"Not so much, sir," Leadspitter agreed, "but there 'tis, sir, an' can't be no tizzer! An' I know lots about itchin', too."

"I'll damn' soon see about *this!*" the captain affirmed, with a brimstone volley. And up on deck he mounted forthwith to see about it, indeed.

THE *CHINA GIRL* was by this time within half a mile of the boat; and even to the naked eye the fact was growing apparent that the boat carried a woman. Leadspitter's binoculars discovered another form there, probably a man, lying inert and motionless in the stern sheets under the pitiless cooking of the sun.

The woman sat beside him, making now no signals; for rescue was at hand. With keen and growing tensions of interest—for the most part heavy with forebodings of evil fortune that impended—officers and crew watched while their ship bore down on the boat. Bohannon's brow, above all, was clouded with displeasure at this embroilment. What effect might it now have upon his plans, his cherished and delightful plans, which just a few minutes before he had been so savoring on the tongue of anticipation?

But there the boat lay, drifting; and whatever impended, pick her up the captain must. His face was a chart of grim ugliness as, when the ship had ranged within a quarter mile, he ordered—

"Back the main tops'l!"

The main yard was thrown aback and the ship brought close to the wind. Slowly losing way, she lay in irons, completely stopped.

"Get the port dingey over!" commanded Bohannon.

The watch jumped to the boat—little urging they needed now—cast the lashings adrift, hove up the davit falls and swung the boat out. When the dingey was lowered, Leadspitter took a crew of four of his best seamen, carefully overlooking Tyson, and gave way handsomely. Like something of a nabob the mate sat in the stern sheets; almost an atmosphere of heroism enveloped him, of rescue for the distressed, knight errantry for the afflicted. Leadspitter looked quite puffed up and proud, in his role, as the dingey foamed buoyantly over the chrome green swells splashed with gorgeous sunlight.

In a few minutes he was alongside the drifting boat, had made her painter fast and was returning with her in tow. The very copper of excitement lay on the tongues of the watchers, aboard, as Leadspitter drew up amidships on the starboard side, where the Jacob's ladder had been put down. A strikingly different type of boat the castaway was, from a mere ship's dingey. Handsomely metaled and varnished and built of fine hardwoods, she showed the emblem of a yacht club on her bow. A small pennant with the initial "V" also depended from a staff.

"Bloomin' yacht's boat!" commented the Cockney. "Millionaire stuff, an' that, perish my pinkies if it eyn't!"

"Chee, if dem's millionaires into it," the gunman judged, "dey're damn' hard lookin' millionaires! De skoit—she's all in, down an' out. An' de old feller, if he ain't kicked off, he's jeezly near it!"

"Poor gal!" the cook murmured. "Pretty nigh wopped out. A wonnerful perishin' she've had!"

"What you s'pose they got in that there suitcase?" asked Antoon, the taxi driver. "Bunch o' kale, eh?"

"Stow it!" growled Tyson. "You damned jackal!"

SILENCE fell, save for the orders necessary to get the castaways aboard and the boats hoisted. Those at the rail could see that the rescued man, although still breathing, was frightfully burned. Heavily bandaged though he was, the terrible severity of his injuries was apparent. Strips that seemed to have been torn from a white duck skirt swathed his head and arms. A grizzle of grayish beard that jutted from the head bandages proved him an oldish man; and the quality of his charred suit of blue showed he was no ordinary sailor. Inert, this man lay in the bottom of the boat.

"Wid just about enough life left in 'un to breathe on," as Solomon Moon said. "Proper bet out an' burned black as a tawny, he is, so!"

The aspect of the woman—the girl, rather—now also lying insensible on the bottom cleats near the man, confirmed the opinion that these were people of wealth. More clearly than any one else, Tyson, leaning over the rail abreast of the main hatch, perceived that here was a woman of no common clay. Often enough, when captain of his own ship, Tyson had come in contact with such people. A personable and seemly young woman this was, despite the terror and hardships she had suffered. Tyson's inerrant, divinatory glance told him here was one of the daughters of the House of Have.

He noted her blue serge skirt and her middy blouse of fine white linen, now sadly smudged with dirt and ashes and salt water; observed a ring wherein a magnificent pigeon's blood ruby glowed in the sunlight. But more especially he saw the opulent mass of lustrous and blue black hair that, all loosened and disheveled, spread thickly on the bottom cleats of the boat. As for the girl's face, that remained invisible. Lying as she was, it was turned from him, hidden against the bandaged right arm of the unconscious, grizzle bearded man.

Tyson had, however, scant time for observation. Work was to be done, and at once.

"LOOK alive there!" commanded Leadspitter. "Rig a whip and bring 'em up!"

Karlstad attached a small block to the topmast backstay, and through it rove a line. A bowline was lowered into the yacht's boat, and the inanimate forms were hoisted on deck by a dozen willing hands.

The boats dropped back from amidships to the quarter where the davit falls of the dingey were hanging loose. First the yacht's boat was hooked on and brought inboard, to be placed amidships on the poop deck; then the davit falls were overhauled to hoist the dingey. The captain's interest centered in the castaways.

"Bring 'em to the break o' the poop and let's have a look at 'em, Mr. Furlong!" commanded Bohannon from the starboard ladder.

Tyson was not among those who carried the rescued aft. Since Bohannon had knocked him over the poop rail, that place had been to him repellent. Only when standing trick at the wheel, or at other orders, had he even approached it. Now leaning against the carpenter shop, he watched the scene in contemplative silence. Strange scene, under the slashing sunshine of those tropic waters.

Vile was Bohannon's humor, viler even than Leadspitter's, as they inspected the castaways. Delays and complications sequent to life saving lay far outside the captain's purview. Worse, a woman introduced factors of the most vexatious. The berthing and accommodation of a woman, aboard that old windjammer, might mean God alone knew what trouble. Worst of all, Bohannon previsioned that the presence of a woman might impose certain restrictions of speech and action on him; and Bohannon was no man to welcome any restraints whatever.

"We got to take 'em in, though, God stiffen 'em!" he exclaimed after a preliminary view. "Into the cabin with 'em!"

Four sailors, under supervision of Abey Buzzard, the wry necked old steward, carried them through the starboard door

into the main cabin, where they laid the man on the table, the girl on the lounge at the port side. For the moment, all Bohannon's thought was directed to getting once more under way.

"Fill your main tops'l again, Mr. Furlong," he commanded. "Let her fall off on her course!"

"Yes, sir," Leadspitter answered. "But between you an' me an' the capstan, sir—" and he showed his crooked teeth—"we're into quite a rookus with these here passengers. Damn' 'f we want to pick up any more boats. Let 'em go to hell, or wherever, says I!"

"Right," agreed the Old Man. "What we don't see, we can't be blamed for not rescuin'. But get her on her course. Sooner the better, now!"

Under Leadspitter's orders the *China Girl* presently took her course again. Leadspitter summoned a few hands to the quarter deck.

"Come on, bear a hand! Pass a lashin' round this boat," he commanded, indicating the one just picked up, "and let her stay where she is. Then get forrard, all o' you swabs. Look alive, or I'll learn you how!"

BOHANNON, turning to inspect the boat, saw the suitcase lying in the stern sheets.

"Hello, what the devil's this?" And he lifted it out. Through all the fume of his displeasure, there was that which now gleamed speculatively in his pale blue eye. That eye diminished to a point of wonder. "They got away with some o' their dunnage, all right."

"That there's a jim-dandy of a piece o' baggage, Cap'n," judged Leadspitter. "It's the genuine cowhide. Liable to be some good stuff inside, there, one kind another. An' look at them letters on it, will you, sir? Gold letters, s'help my cod!"

"I. L. R.," read Bohannon. "Mmmm! Tony folks, eh, what? "More hell! They'll be wantin' us to put in somewheres and set 'em ashore!"

He pondered a silent moment. Fragmentary thoughts crossed his tortuous brain. Might this not after all jump with his plans? His spade ended fingers scratched his cranium as he tried to stimulate thought. How colorable an excuse might this not give him for making port somewhere—port, where he himself could quit the doomed ship! Not too bad, this notion. And moreover, rich folk like these, what might they not pay for such service? Far from bad! Matters might, after all, be in excellent train for Captain Bohannon!

For all that, though, the captain still let his anger burn. Anger was to Bohannon a luxury he never missed freely indulging. But Abey Buzzard interrupted his thoughts by coming on deck to report:

"We got 'em stowed, sir. Any time you wants to put 'em to a survey, sir, they're ready."

"Here, stewart, take this bag below," the captain ordered. "I'll go down and see what's what. I'll send Mr. Mayes up to take charge." This, to Leadspitter. "Then you come below, yourself. We got a few matters to decide on now!"

MATTERS, indeed. Problems of the most urgent!

The man stretched out on the cabin table, they saw without need of more than half an eye, was already dying. Burns such as he had received could end in only one way.

"This old cuss is nigh hand to hove down on his beam ends," Leadspitter commented. "He's took some jeroosly awful damage, sir!" As Abey loosened the bandages, with sundry jerks and quavers of his head, the steward being a nervous man, the three saw that the stranger's race was run. "He's all-fired nigh dead, sir, that's sure as shootin'. Look a' them arms an' that face. Burned to a crisp!"

"Yes, and his chist, too," the captain answered, scrutinizing the man under the gleam through the skylight. "Looks 's if he'd been spattered with burnin' oil, or somethin' like. Gas, mebbe. He's

more 'n likely breathed fire, too. I think it's a doubt if he'll stand it till night, hardly. Burned black as zip!"

"Yes, sir, an' old too, goin' up for seventy years or the like o' that. Death struck is what he is, I hope to tell you. I wouldn't give a tinker's dam for his life. Well, that's one of 'em we'll get clear of, anyhow. There ain't nothin' we can do for him."

"*Nothin'* is right," Bohannon agreed. "You and the stewart take him in one o' the spare cabins. Any one 'll do. He won't be occupyin' it long!"

When they had carried the dying man to a berth and left him there—

"Now then," said Bohannon, "let's have a look at the gal!"

They found her uninjured, so far as burns were concerned. Shock, exhaustion, thirst accounted for her prostration. Contemplatively they studied her, devoid of pity but with keen calculation.

"She's had one cold smack, all right," grunted Leadspitter. "But she ain't hurt none. She'll soon come to rights, on an even keel. Whoever she is, devil take me, but she's one good looker!"

"You take a reef or two and bear away!" the captain meaningly warned. "Stow that kind o' talk. Whatever this here ship is, you bet your jib halyards there won't be no funny business. No monkey business like that, mind you! We're carryin' a good full o' trouble, right now, without no petticoat mixups. What I'd like to know is who the hell she is, where from and where bound. Likewise, if it comes to that, how much it's worth to me, rescuin' her at sea?"

"Only way to bottom that out, I reckon, is to bring her to. A little stain o' rum might fix her."

"Stewart," Bohannon ordered, "a bucket o' water and a tot o' rum!"

"Yes, sir!" And Abey Buzzard fetched both. "Will I fix her up? I'm a married man, sir. I knows all about women."

"If you do, you old gumphead," the captain retorted, "you know more 'n any other man livin'. But heave ahead with her. You're old enough so it's safe, anyhow!"

THEY watched while Abey Buzzard roughly swabbed her hands and face with water, then forced rum into her mouth, slopping more than half of it over her full rounded throat. Watched, while she stirred there on the lounge, groaned, opened dark eyes dazed with pain and wonder.

"You're all right, miss," the captain rumbled in a tone he meant to be ingratiating, soothing. "You're gettin' all fine and shipshape again. You're safe aboard now—safe."

The girl, shuddering, tried to struggle up; but Bohannon pushed her back again, with his huge and anchor tattooed paw.

"No, no, miss, you lay down and keep quiet!" he commanded. "You've had it tough and rugged. Been took a bit abaft, and keeled over. You're all spun out now. But you'll soon be A-1, slick 's a mole. Lay still, now. That's the best you can do."

"Father!" she exclaimed in a weak voice fining down to a whisper. "Where's father?"

"Right in that there cabin, miss." And he jerked an unseemly thumb at the cabin door. "We got your dunnage, all righto." He picked up the suitcase and set it on the table. "Here she is, see? Your father, he's comf'table as could be expected. Now, go to sleep. Get a little kink and you'll be fine!"

"I want to see my father!"

"Well, you can't see your father—not just yet!" the captain asserted with considerable vehemence. "We're lookin' out for your father!"

"Is he—dead?"

"No, he ain't. There now, you lay quiet!"

For a moment, with large and frightened eyes, she peered up at Bohannon, Leadspitter and old Abey Buzzard. Dimly she perceived the cradling roll of the ship, heard the creak and give of timbers that constituted the old vessel's answer to the sea. But, very clearly, she

had not fully recovered her understanding. Life still swam before her, mistily obscured, as if dimming veils of haze. At last—

"If you say he's all right—" she faltered, and they saw her eyes were deeper blue than any sea; so blue, so deep, they verged almost on black.

"Ain't I said so, a'ready?" demanded the captain. "Think I'm lyin', eh, what? I'm truthful, miss; *I* am!"

The girl tried to say a few words, but fell away to silence without making herself intelligible. Drawing in a deep breath, she sank to oblivions of exhaustion.

"Leave her be, sir; beggin' your pardon," ventured old Abey. "I knows all about women. She'll be fine arfter a bit o' sleep."

"Look," answered Bohannon. "Carry her in that spare cabin next her old man. Fix her up comf'table. Mr. Furlong, you bear a hand, too—that is, carryin' her in."

Mate and steward bore her away, limp, helpless. The captain remained staring at the suitcase, fascinated by its luxurious leather, the gold stamped initials, the possibilities it might enclose. Presently Leadspitter emerged from the cabin whither they had carried the girl. Bohannon silently beckoned him, gestured eloquently at the suitcase. Leadspitter nodded.

Just then the captain saw Abey Buzzard peering out at him with an odd, wondering look.

"Will I bring her baggage in to her, too, sir?" the steward asked.

"No! I've given you your orders, you old mope. Fix that woman up comf'table in that there cabin, and look alive about it, or I'll give you a bit o' the rough side o' my tongue! And remember one thing, stewart!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Nothin' as happens here goes *out* o' here, savvy? No long tongues wanted aboard o' this one. I'm the best tightener of loose mouths as ever trod a ratline! Get me?"

"Yes—yes, sir!" Abey vanished.

Bohannon picked up the suitcase and nodded his head toward the door of his own room. Leadspitter followed him thither. Once inside, with the catch on the door shot home, Bohannon laid the suitcase on his desk.

"Now then, Mr. Furlong," he bit out, "now then, let's see what's what."

CHAPTER V

TREASURE AND DEATH

"WHAT'S what?" echoed Leadspitter. His thick fingers shook a little as he filled and lighted his pipe. This thing of investigating rich folks' baggage had somewhat sapped his nerve. "It wouldn't be just the proper ticket to open that there suitcase, d'you think?"

"Why not, wouldn't it?"

"Well, sir, I ain't superstitious, nor nothin'. But you know the old sayin', as how a suitcase aboard ship allus brings bad luck. Best thing we—you—could do, seems like, would be to leave it lay."

"Well, I ain't goin' to, nohow!" Bohannon decided. "And what's more, I'm askin' you to heave up 'longside and bear a hand with me, doin' it. I want you to see all's done reg'lar and shipshape—no shenanigans."

Leadspitter thought:

"Devil of a lot *you* care about reg'lar and shipshape. You're only askin' me to help because I'd know you done it, anyhow, and you want to work me in on it to share up the trouble, if it comes to that!" All he voiced, though, was:

"You're cap'n, here. Heave ahead, sir, if you think fit."

"Course I think fit!" Bohannon returned, his eyes narrowing. "Why wouldn't I? Ain't I got the legal right to know what's bein' brought aboard my ship? Supposin' there was smuggled stuff into it? Or arms and ammynition? Might be a pistol, eh, what?"

"Yes, that's so," the mate assented. "I never thought o' that. An' besides—"

"Well, what?"

"Oh, nothin'. Heave ahead, sir. Let's put it to a survey!"

Bohannon unstrapped the suitcase, which here or there showed charred spots. He opened the lock, raised the cover.

"Mmph!" he grunted. "Only a female fit out, I reckon. Not much *here!* And what there is, it's all like an old fireship's garret, everythin' on top and nothin' handy!"

His huge and tattooed hand pawed at feminine small wares and apparel. He was about to close the suitcase again, when his fingers touched metal. His half embarrassed ineptitude vanished.

"Hello! What's this, now?" he exclaimed with an oath. "A gun?"

It was not, however, a gun. As Bohannon dragged out the metal object, it stood revealed as a japanned dispatch box, with J. D. L. painted on its lid.

"What the devil's this?" the captain repeated.

"It's a tin box, sir."

"Oh, it is, eh? Thanks for tellin' me!" Bohannon gibed, his scarred lip asnarl. "You're a man of grand observation, Mr. Furlong. I ain't blind. A box, yes. But what's into it? That, ah, that's the question now!"

Setting the box on his desk, he turned a key still in its lock.

"By Judas Priest, sir," Leadspitter protested, "that's mebbe sailin' a bit too free, openin' that there!"

"Who knows but what the pistol's in here?" demanded the captain. "I got the legal right to know. It's my duty, by jolly, to know, and I'm goin' to!"

Whereupon, without further ado, he opened the metal box.

FOR A moment they remained there, meshed in silence; a silence into which intruded only the creak of masts and yards, the whispering of cloven waters along the hull, the various voices of a ship at sea. But all at once—

"Thunderin' God!" the captain gulped.

Leadspitter reached out, uncertainly touched the contents of the box, drew back again. The mate's eyes were wide, his jaw hanging. The pipe fell, spark throwing and unheeded, to the floor.

"By the jumpin' Jehosophat!" he stammered.

Bohannon fell to pawing over the cash. Under his rough and trembling fingers the sheaves of yellow backs crumpled, the bonds wrinkled. A lust of greed burned in his eyes, which had become those of a wolf. Eagerly he licked his lips.

"Hell's bells, Furlong—what a find!"

"It's all o' that, by the Judas! Looks like a little million. But, but what d'you mean, sir, a find?"

"A find is a find, ain't it, you lumphead? Money's money!"

"Yes, but that's 'cordin' to whose it is. And this here—it ain't ourn."

"No, not now. But, it might be! Eh, what?"

"Might be, sir? I—I don't quite fathom it out. Where you drivin'?"

Silence again, while eye met eye, lips tightened. The captain's scar had grown livid. He swallowed mechanically.

"Are you a mouse or a man?" he shot at Leadspitter.

"You'd oughta know! What's on your chist? Heave it off!"

"Pull up your braces and square yourself fore an' aft, Mr. Furlong. Take your bearin's. Let's see how much guts you got!"

"Well, sir?"

"Who does all this here stuff belong to?"

"Them two. An' when the old 'un slips his wind, it's the gal's. I—I ain't quite got the lay of it yet, sir."

"You ain't got the wit of a louse!" Bohannan growled. "Just supposin' that there gal—somethin' was to happen her—"

"Ah! Meanin'—"

"You damn' muttonhead! Supposin'—" and Bohannon's voice lowered to hardly more than a thread of sound—"supposin' some dark night she was to get lost overboard, or the like o' that?"

"By God!"

"We could take care o' that part of it slick as pins. But there'd have to be two of us, savvy? One reports it. T'other

calls the mainm'st to witness it's true. Swears to it on a stack o' Bibles—swears till all's blue!"

"Shhh! Ease off, Cap'n. Not so loud!"

Leadspitter hauled up a camp stool and sat down cheek by jowl with Captain Bohannon.

"This here, now, is what I calls grammatical! You're a cool star, all righto, but I'm just as cool. Without no frills to it, you mean we're to whack up this here stuff?"

"*You* ain't so damn' tender that you don't get my drift! *You* won't tear under the wing!"

"We goin' to let Pete Mayes in on this?"

Bohannon shouted an angry answer:

"Hell's bells, no! What d'you think I am, a complete fool?"

Mechanically Leadspitter drummed on the desk top.

"No, I never thought *that* o' you, anyhow. So then, it's just you an' me."

The first wine of excitement was dying in their veins. Now their pulses were beginning to beat with a more calculant tempo.

"Lost overboard," the captain repeated. "That's what I said. Act o' God, stress o' weather, or whatever. And nobody but us two knows what in this here box, do they?"

"No. How much d'you make it, Cap'n?"

Bohannon dumped the contents of the dispatch box on to his desk and spread it abroad. A little chamois bag caught his eye. This bag had lain beneath the paper money and the bonds, and thus had till now escaped him. With thick fingers that quivered a bit he picked it up. Leadspitter eagerly exclaimed—

"Cast off them cords there, sir, an' let's see!"

With some difficulty Bohannon loosened the chamois bag. From it he poured out a cascade of diamonds, small and large, of emeralds, rubies, sapphires. Even in the half light of the cabin the precious stones winked and shimmered, fascinating pools of liquid light.

"HOLY murder in Ireland!" the captain gasped.

Leadspitter made odd, grunting noises, half breathless and blown by winds of covetousness. He managed to articulate—

"How—how much—"

"Lashin's o' money!" Bohannon exclaimed. "I ain't strong on estimatin' joolry, or the like o' that, but I know there's many a king's ransome for less 'n just these here. As for the bonds and cash—"

"Devil take the bonds! We don't want no truck nor dealin' with bonds, Cap'n! Ain't people always gettin' ketched up that way, an' hove on a lee shore, monkeyin' with bonds? Burn 'em up, sir, heave 'em to hell's alley an' gone. That's my say! But the cash money there, the rhino—how much? Count it, Cap'n, count it!"

Bohannon's clumsy fingers shook as he stacked up the heavy bundles of banknotes—some of them the big white ones of the Bank of England—and began counting. Wolfish eyed, Leadspitter watched, with suspended breath.

"Hundred and five thousand, American," the captain announced. "Sixteen thousand pounds, English. That's, let's see, call it eighty thousand bucks. Hundred and eighty-five thousand, without them jools."

He fell silent, his eyes like live coals. For a moment Leadspitter could find no words. Only the rumor of their heavy breathing and the send of the waves against the hull disturbed that pregnant silence.

"Hundred an'—eighty-five thousand!" gulped Leadspitter. Sweating and with red hair rucked up, he made a singular figure of agitation. "That's—by Judas Priest!—that's more 'n ninety thousand apiece for us, an'—"

"Slack away aft!" the captain growled. "Who said anything about even-steven?"

"Ain't you goin' to?"

"Like hell! Here, here, don't you try to get to wind'ard o' me, Mr. Furlong! You're on the wrong tack, entire. One

third is what you get, and that's a damn' sight more 'n you deserve, too, me thinkin' up the whole scheme and all. One third, all snug and tidy. Take it or leave it! Well, what say?"

A moment, it seemed that Leadspitter was minded to contest. But the captain's brow was heavy with menace. He threatened.

"You're liable not to get a cent, if you don't speak up lively!"

"All right, sir," the mate conceded. "Have it your own way. One third. That's sixty for my cut, anyhow. An' them there stones?"

"Same share. But—"

A TIMID knocking at the door checked him.

"Who the devil's that?"

"Me, sir," sounded Abey Buzzard's voice. "I just wanted to say, sir, the old man—it's all off with him."

"Kicked the bucket, you mean?"

"Yes, sir. Thought you'd oughta know."

"All right. Sheer off!" To Leadspitter he muttered, "I hope, by jolly, that old fool of a stewart ain't noticed we got the suitcase in here!"

"He don't notice nothin'," the mate hardly more than whispered. "He don't notice not even the sun, don't know he's alive. I ain't worryin' none about Abey!"

Already Bohannon was tying up the gems in the buckskin bag, replacing bag, money, bonds much as they had been, in the metal box. He closed the box and locked it, then shoved it back into the suitcase which he tightly strapped. A moment he pondered, with another and a new idea pulling him by the ear. Leadspitter watched him keenly; he smeared sweat from his forehead, heavily beaded, and huskily breathed—

"Man Aloft, but it's hot here!"

"Harkee, Mr. Furlong," the captain suddenly spoke. "You and me, we're pardners into this here, now, one third for you and two for me. That's a say so, both of us, and stands. But I'm thinkin' this here may not be such a picnic, at that. It's all up to you to keep a stopper on your jaw. If this here, if any breath o' this money now, was to get forrard—"

"Among them beggars forrard?"

"That's it. If they was to suspicion it—"

"You mean they might start a manus? Mutinize, on us?"

"You're a good guesser. We might have a racket with 'em, all right. That gang o' hell benders, they'd tear the hearts out of us through our teeth, to get the stuff; yes, and the livers, too! And you can lay to that, solid."

"A lot *they* could do!" truculently returned the mate.

"You can't never tell what they might do! So you just be careful and double-reef your tongue, savvy? It's a fact we got all the guns." Bohannon glanced at the ship's armament suspended above. "But our aft guard is only me and you, Peter Mayes and old Abey. Course, we could count on Bosun Saltash and a few o' the stiddiest men. But forrard there's fifteen or more as hard cases as ever I see in one bunch. What's more, there's one of 'em—"

"You mean that black livered cod, Tyson?"

"Right! He's got brains, that lad has Most of 'em don't know enough to lap salt," Bohannon judged, "but if they was torched up and led by Tyson—And you've got to log him as a smart 'un. He'd be in our wake, sure as shootin'. He's got guts, too. He'd tackle hell with half a pint o' water. Ain't much like his uncle, damned old yeller spined coward! And—"

"So you admit as how old Jason Mellish *is* his uncle, for a fact?"

"What's the use denyin' it, to you? No odds, anyhow. All as matters is Tyson. With a scrapper like that—"

"Nothin' to hinder Tyson takin' a high dive too, some night, is there?"

"Not," the captain replied, "not if we was put to it, proper. But there ain't no use takin' long shots. The wind's hangin' from a good quarter, for us. Let's keep it so. There ain't no use takin' chances."

Eloquently he touched his thin and gash-like mouth. "So—you know!"

"I'm wise, Cap'n. But what you goin' to do with the stuff, for now?"

"Do? Goin' to give it back to the gal, o' course. Arfter that, well, if I spilled all the wind out o' my sails, you'd know as much as what I do!"

"An' that's just what I got to know!" the mate declared with choleric insistence. "We're into this here now, together. We're pardners. That means we got to work together!"

"Yes, just as far as I'm willin', and no farther. Stow that stuff, Mr. Furlong! I'm runnin' this here business. But you'll get your whack. Don't you worry none about that. I'm honest, I am. When I say I'll do a thing, by the Law Clink, I'll do it. First thing, though, the stuff goes back to the gal. It's hers, now the old man has lost the number of his mess. Hers for a while. Arfter that—"

"Arfter that?"

"Leave it to me. Take your bearin's, close your windbag and keep it closed. That's all!"

"Look a' here, Cap'n! If you don't play square—"

"That 'll do you! What? Threatenin' your superior officer? Hell's bells, but that's nigh hand to mutiny!" Bohannon's pale eyes bored through the mate, gimlet-like. Leadspitter's own fell. "Now then, mum's the word. And here goes to put the stuff back, all proper and honest-like!"

WHILE Leadspitter keenly watched him, he got up and unlocked the door. Taking the suitcase, he swung across the slant of the main cabin floor to the girl's cabin, knocked, got no answer, and entered. He set the case down beside the berth where she was lying; then for a moment he stood watching her with evil and prehensive calculation.

All at once the girl's dark eyes opened; and Bohannon found himself enveloped in a gaze whose steady scrutiny, for all his bravado, just a little abashed him.

"My father?" the girl asked, weakly. "Is he better?"

"Miss," replied the captain, with rather a failure of trying to render his tone sympathetic, "miss, I wish you was a little stronger. The news I got for you—"

Her look widened. She struggled up and sat there trembling in the berth.

"You mean—"

Bohannon boggled the divulgation clumsily as an elephant trying to play a harp.

"I mean—don't take it too hard, miss," he mustered enough hypocrisy to condole, "I mean as how there's things happen to all of us, now and again."

"You mean he's dead?"

"Well, his moorin's has slipped, for a fact, in a manner of speakin'. His anchor chain has parted, I got to admit."

"If he's dead, tell me!"

"Ain't that just what I'm doin', miss? When I tell you he's topped his boom, as you might say—parted his gear—"

"Where is he?" she cried, and got to her feet, holding unsteadily to the side of the berth. "Where is he?"

"Next cabin, miss. But you hadn't oughta—"

"Let me go to him! Let me go!"

"Oh, all right." Then, as she tried to reach the door, he caught her arm, half supported her. "But don't take it too hard. Not too doggoned hard, miss!"

He led her to the cabin where the dead man lay, and opened the door for her.

"Don't come in, please," she whispered brokenly. "I just want to be alone with him, for the last time—alone . . ."

HALF an hour on—a half hour during which Bohannon had sat herding his thoughts about robbery, Leadspitter, Bahia Blanca and the roaring Horn—the captain spatted out the last of several pipefuls and betook himself to the cabin of death. He knocked and entered.

He stood a moment in the doorway, covertly smiling, his heart granitic with exultation that things were so aptly falling to his hand. But—

"Come, come," he made a shift of saying in a voice that tried to soothe. He laid an ape paw on her shoulder as the girl knelt beside the bunk where lay the dead man. "Come now, miss, this here don't do no good, grievin' don't. We all has to go by the board, all come to anchor forever, one time another. Takin' on, that don't help none. What's done is done, ain't it? Well then, buck up! That's what I say, miss—buck up!"

She looked at him a silent moment, with a courage that nobly partnered her grief. Then she reached for his hand, pressed it. Bohannon dribbled out a few more words of cant:

"I know it's tough, miss. It's all fired, awful tough, but—"

"You're good to me," she whispered. "Forgive me if I'm weak." Her lip trembled. "I—oughtn't to be weak. I'm a sea captain's daughter myself. So I know—"

"Eh, what? He had a ship? What name?"

"*Viajero*. Our yacht. My father was navigating her when she burned. I'll tell you about it later. But now—what must be done—it must be. That's what you mean?"

"Ah, now you're talkin' like a woman of humgumption! A complete hand you are, that's what. Come on, miss, heave up out o' there. Don't stay there, the like o' that. Go on back to your own berth and have a lay down. Hungry, eh? Plenty to eat, here, and then some. Drink, too. Anything you want, we're fair glad and happy to give it to you. Best we got!"

"As if I wanted anything but my father!"

She yielded, though, as he drew her up and away.

"It's rough, miss. Dog fired rough. But you know how things is, aboard ship."

"Yes. You mean—"

"Sure! It wouldn't do, y'know, keepin' him. Not with a crew like what we got forrard. They're that superstitious! Trouble enough as it is, without addin' none to it. And besides," he added with fine tact, "this hot weather—and no ice—"

"I understand. So, it's got to be right away?"

"Yes, miss. Right off the bat, as you might say."

She sighed heartbrokenly.

"Just go out a minute, Captain. Please! Just till I say goodby to him. Then it—it'll be all right."

He left her alone, closed the door and stood waiting. His eye gleamed with mercenary calculation.

"A game 'un!" he pondered. "Sea cap'n's daughter, too. Hmmm! That's bad. No easy mark, this here female ain't." He scratched his baldish head with some displeasure. "But arfter all, that don't make a damn's odds. She's only a gal. And there's ways, ways."

Presently she came out of the cabin, stood a moment with her hand lingering against the door, then walked to her own room. Even in those few steps, as Bohannon watched her slim grace, he knew she had spoken truth. No woman walks like that, who has not long been familiar with the sea.

WHEN she had vanished into her cabin Bohannon went to his own for a welt of rum, and—thus fortified—sought Leadspitter in the mate's room. He found Leadspitter barefoot and in only undershirt and trousers. The mate, stretched out in his bunk, was brooding in a smoky atmosphere.

"Time to give the old son of a one a sea toss," began the captain. "Quicker the better. They don't keep long, this hot weather. They get high, mighty all fired quick."

"O. K., sir. I'll have the stiff sewed up right away." Leadspitter grinned with yellow teeth. "That's one of 'em, anyhow, got rid of." And expectantly Leadspitter sat up.

"Y'know, Mr. Furlong, he was some kind o' deep water man, himself. A skip, or somethin'."

"So?"

"Yes, she told me. She's a seafarin'

man's daughter. That, by joycus, makes it harder. Hard to cut any dingdoes with them kind."

"What ship was it, did she say? What happened?"

"Yacht *Viajero*. Know more later. She's one jim slicker, all righto," the captain continued. "You can tell by the look of her figgerhead she ain't no ornery female."

"Clew up, sir!" ventured Leadspitter, emitting much smoke. "We ain't goin' to misstay none, by lettin' this here get personal, as you might say. If she was the Queen o' Sheba herself—"

"Yes, I know. But—well, we got to keep a sharp lookout and not run on no reefs. These here kind o' women, they ain't so easy as some. We got to remember that."

"Oh, I guess the pair of us can handle her," the mate opined. "I ain't worryin' none. Once we get her old man slipped overside, we'll tackle the next job. One thing to a time, that's me."

"Right! Well—fix him up any time now and let's get it done with."

Bohannon withdrew to the dead man's cabin, while Leadspitter, grumbling, summoned Boatswain Saltash.

"Bosun," he ordered, "get some old togal'n cloth in the sail locker an' sew up the stiff. Be sure you ballast him good, too. Quick as you're ready, we'll heave him."

"Yes, sir," answered the old P. I, and twisted his stringy gray mustache. "Couple o' prayer books 'll do, sir?"

"Put in a bible, too, for full measure. I reckon he was a pretty good man, an' it takes a lot to keep a good man down!"

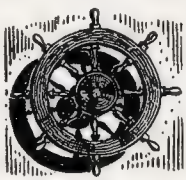
On which jest, both grinning, they terminated the interview. Leadspitter continued smoking. The boatswain departed to busy himself with preparations for the burial at sea.

Bohannon meantime, was searching the body. His eye was the eye of a crocodile, his smile that of a hyena. Into his pocket he slipped some thirty dollars in bills and silver, of which he relieved the corpse.

"Here, by God," he muttered, "is a little jack I don't have to share up with Leadspitter. And what's the devilish use of lettin' this old stiff keep it? Lot o' good it'd do *him*, where he's goin'!"

The dead man's watch and a few papers he laid aside, to give the girl. Then, matters seeming in good train, he went back to his own cabin once more for another drink or two.

The *China Girl* meantime, with a fair and following breeze, was logging off the knots, shortening the long sea miles that lay between her and the Horn.



TO BE CONTINUED

A gold strike is likely to change a man's viewpoint on many things—

Especially DANCE HALL WOMEN

By ALMA and PAUL ELLERBE

LONG JIM BRIGGS wandered into Al's Dance Hall one night when "Captain Mac" was drunk and throwing things.

She had splendid deep red hair and a skin as white as blanched almonds, and he admired her extravagantly. As a child admires a Christmas tree. And differently, too—very differently. He had even given up prospecting now and then and made good money as a carpenter so that he could spend it on her. He had spent it all, and he knew her very well, but he had never seen her drunk before. He had been in such places a good deal, but he hadn't got used to seeing women drunk. It hurt him.

He was about to wander on out again when he heard one of the other girls say:

"She's gonna pay for this all right! Al will make 'er come acrost with the expenses of the whole damn' place for a month for that big mirror she broke!"

Long Jim hesitated and then started toward her. She took a saucer from one of the little tables and sailed it like a clay pigeon. It curved and hit him over the eye. The blood ran down his cheek and everybody laughed. He wiped it away with his handkerchief and put his hand

on her arm just as she was going to throw another saucer.

"Why, Rosie—" he said reproachfully, in his soft, rumbling bass, and stopped helplessly. His soft black eyes looked out kindly above his soft brown mustache and his great soft brown beard, and said what his tongue couldn't find the words for.

Captain Mac was madder than she was drunk. All her sensations and her thoughts were combined in one ache, like the ache in a tooth, and she was biting upon it savagely and taking a kind of satisfaction in the keen shoots of her pain. She could have knifed Al that night out of hand and seen through stoically whatever might have come of it, but Jim Briggs' voice and his eyes were the kind of things she had forgotten the existence of, and they slipped in under her guard and pierced the quick of her.

She didn't throw the other saucer, but suddenly Rosie Ellen McCarthy, a decent Irish girl, looked out of her eyes and said with a flash of passionate appeal—

"For God's sake, Jim, take me out o' this!"

Jim didn't expect it. It touched him so deeply that he could only gulp and nod his head. With his great height and bent shoulders and baggy clothes he looked uncouth and awkward, standing beside painted, half nude Captain Mac in her spangled dress. He looked around helplessly for something to cover her shoulders with.

"This'll do," she said, stretching out her hand for a yellow scarf on the top of a gilded upright piano.

She took it with one strong pull, slinging heedlessly along the floor in a rain of broken bits half a dozen pieces of bric-à-brac that had rested upon it.

Jim folded the gaudy stuff clumsily about her and took her by the arm and started to go out, when Al came up and stood in front of him, dapper, suave and touched with cynicism.

"There's money owing me," he said politely, "and she ain't going nowhere till it's paid, see?"

The red surged into Jim's cheeks, pale from working underground, and his voice rose dangerously out of its soft rumble.

"There's a hell of a lot more than money owing you, you God-forgotten little skunk, and if you don't get out o' my way I'm liable to pay you the part of it you ain't lookin' for!"

He kept his eye on the other's hands and his muscles braced. If you started things in Al's place you finished them swiftly, or they finished you.

The white hairy fingers twitched into the expected signal and Jim swung the bony mass of his fist against Al's ear as he would have swung a pick into a stubborn conglomeration of quartz. But that was incidental. He didn't even notice where the little man rolled. Jerked forward by Al's signal, a very different antagonist was coming on the jump—Hard Pan Schmitz, the dance hall bouncer.

Jim Briggs was no match for him and knew it. Almost as if he had followed through the blow that sent Al spinning, he snatched up a heavy lighted lamp, whirled it above his head and flung it. It struck Schmitz's raised forearm, smashed down his guard and covered him with broken glass and burning oil.

In the stunned second before the racket began Jim took Rosie by the wrist and broke through to the street. Behind them the place seethed like an ants' nest laid open by a spade.

He pulled her around the first corner. They pelted through the snow as fast as she could run. He zigzagged his way through the town, taking alleys when he could. They came at length to the door of a wooden shack below the level of the sidewalk, on an unlighted street. Its unpainted boards were warped, it listed heavily and, in common with all the other houses in the block, it looked deserted. But Jim jumped down to it, key in hand, and by the time Rosie had descended the rickety steps that led from the sidewalk he had opened the door.

He shut it behind her, struck a match and led the way into a room furnished with a stove, a camp cot, a chair and a small pine table with a smoke blackened

lamp on it. He lighted the lamp. Rosie fell into the chair, breathing in big painful gulps. She wasn't used to running. The great altitude—ten thousand feet—had played havoc with her breath. Jim had swung a pick there too long to be much affected. They looked at each other in the dim light.

"It's jest a place to sleep," he said awkwardly. "Nobody knows I own it. Feller gave it to me that struck it rich an' went away. Mostly I'm in the hills anyhow. So wouldn't anybody look for us here."

And then:

"The sheriff and the marshal's both down on Al. If we can get away without bein' noticed, it ain't likely anybody'll foller."

"Maybe it'd be safe for you to stay, then," said Rosie, when she had breath enough to say anything.

"Maybe. But I was aimin' to go anyhow. Why don't you go with me, an'—an' *stay* with me?"

She looked at him steadily.

"I ain't fit."

"You're as fit as I am," he said quietly, in the soft, rumbling, reassuring bass that seemed kin to rivers and winds. "What d'you say to a clean break an' a new start together?" He lingered on the last word wistfully. "I've been pretty lonesome, you know, a-knockin' round from one prospect hole to another an' livin' like a pack rat."

She got up and came close and looked at him intently. The yellow piano scarf that covered her befrizzled red head like an incongruous cowl and clashed crudely with her red dress; her silver slippers, her spangles, the bunch of cotton roses at her waist, her rouged cheeks and scarlet lips and half-bared heaving breasts contrasted strangely with her honest eyes.

"Do you want it for yourself, Jim?"

"For myself—more'n anything."

"You're not lying to me?"

"So help me God."

He had expected her arms about his neck, but she gave him her hand like a man.

"I'll never let you down," she said shortly. "Let's go."

They went out under a sky of faint, clean blue, where a frosty moon queened it amidst a scattering of small pale stars, and found a man who was driving out of town in a wagon and went with him.

By one means and another they made their way into the Gray Dome country and Jim built a cabin there.

FIFTEEN years later, Rosie Briggs stood in the door of it and watched Jim climb down the steep trail toward his latest prospect hole.

There was a fresh sprinkling of snow, so light and dry that the faint wind started bits of it to rolling like feathers. Beneath it the smells of spruce and pine and juniper and little silver mountain sage were dormant. The cold, clean, thin air of early morning was stripped for the odor of Long Jim's pipe, and it drifted up, rank and acrid. Rosie liked it, at that hour and in that place.

She watched him until he waved his hand far below like a tiny marionette before he took the fork of the trail under the big Engelmann spruce and disappeared for the day. She waved back and turned to her tubs. Every week she washed the clothes of four families in Gray Dome, the mining town down the main road just around the next bend. It was hard work, but she didn't mind it much.

She didn't think about it. Besides, she only worked four days a week. The other three she rested—sewed a little, crocheted a little, knit a little—sweaters and stockings and mittens for Jim and herself, and kept her diminutive house as clean as a chemist's scales; or sat quietly out in front in summer or inside by the stove in winter and let the long waves of peace wash deeper and deeper in. Peace is good after a life like Rosie's. She lay in it thankfully, as in a bath, and soaked old stains away.

On the side of Gray Dome Mountain, with the sheer drop of the cañon at her feet and the range spread out beyond; in the midst of cleanness and silence

unbroken since that old rocky backbone of the continent thrust itself up into the sun, she had risen slowly out of the shards of the life of Captain Mac and come, late but surely, into her heritage of womanliness and dignity. The years had chipped away her prettiness, but in its place was beauty for those who could see it. The smooth face had been sculptured into something fine and strong and self-directed, something steadfast and serene. She wasn't blown about by tantrums any more.

She had a stake in the game of life now, and she played to hold it. She had steadied to meet the responsibilities thrust upon her by Jim. He was as kind and patient as the seasons, and as unreliable. And she was like a cottonwood tree; she put out the leaves of her affection and confidence surely and abundantly, but with tireless caution and she rarely got nipped. She controlled him where he could be controlled, and where he couldn't she accepted him as she did the weather. Her knowledge of men was empirical, unhampered by theories.

Jim would give anybody anything she had—he possessed nothing himself—and be perennially surprized if she objected. Usually she didn't, but if it was something she wanted she went after it and got it back if she could. Any bum or crook or sharper could win his friendship and pick his mind or his pocket if either happened to have anything in it.

But Rosie's mind was her own, and instead of a pocket she used the Conifer County Savings Bank. She met him at all points as shrewdly as if he had been an opponent—which in a sense he was—but she loved him. And she knew that he loved her, and counted on it, but only for what it was worth.

She put more trust in his poverty. Every day, of course, he expected to strike it. And for a while she had thought he might. But gradually as the days lay themselves down in long, pleasantly monotonous rows until the sum of them made many years, she came to know that he wouldn't. And *that*, far more than his love, was the foundation of her content. While he was poor he was hers—wholly, unqualifiedly, unthinkingly hers.

Poor was scarcely the word, though. Jim lived in a moneyless world. Out of the little she made she supplied the simple necessities of both of them, and he was willing to wait for everything else until he struck it. "Then—! Then—!" was what he thought of as he made his slow way up and down the mountainside. To him the thought was roseate, luminous, rejuvenescent.

But Rosie hated it. If for nothing else, because it held the seeds of possible change. After a chancy life, she valued most, of things attainable by human beings, a life that was free from chances.

On this morning in spring an eagle slanted down the sky on wide, still wings; the ice broke up and tinkled in Little Cub Creek in the cañon; the orange and yellow shoots of the willows swelled out toward catkins; and Rosie washed her clothes contentedly, secure in the knowledge that there *was* no "then"; while over in his hole in the side of Old Baldy Jim broke up her world with quick excited blows of a short-handled miner's pick.

She was hanging out the clothes on the squawberry bushes at the back when she heard the impatient crash of his elk hide boots. She went quickly through the house and stopped in the front door at sight of him.

When he swung up his heavy bag of samples for a signal, she knew. Knew before she heard his whoop. And when it cut across the stillness like the whistle of a locomotive it struck her cold. It chilled the core of her spirit, as an icy wind loosed in the tropics would chill a naked native.

"Struck it, by thunder! Two hundred dollars to the ton, if it's worth a cent! An' the vein as plain as a layer o' choc'late in a cake!"

He fell into a chair on the porch. Rosie stood and stared at him. The one thing he knew was ore. He had the kind of knowledge that men had been willing to pay for when he'd sell it. His "then" had

come. The realization went through her consciousness in widening rings. Whatever else it meant, it meant the end of this; the beginning of uncertainty.

He caught her in his arms and swept her into the cabin and danced her about until the place shook.

"Didn't I tell you? Didn't I say you'd ride in your own auto yet? It had to come, old lady, it jest nacherally had to come!"

He gave her a hug and turned her loose.

"I knowed it," he said solemnly. "I've allus knowed it. Away down deep in there—" he tapped his breast—"I've had a hunch."

He flung himself into a chair and looked at her hard. "Ain't you glad?" he said suddenly.

She was like a boat that has luffed into the wind. For a moment her mental sails hung flapping. Then they filled and strained and she set out before this new cold breeze. She told him as best she could that she was glad.

"To look at you a feller might think you was kinder sorry like," he said quizzically. "What's the matter?"

"I *was* thinkin' a little about how happy we'd been right here—just you and me and the house you made yourself."

"'Twarn't a patch on what it's gonna be," he said, and jumped up and was off with his samples to the assayer's in Gray Dome. He stepped strongly, as a young man does. Half the stoop was gone from his shoulders.

Rosie turned back slowly and sat down heavily at the kitchen table, her occupation gone. Jim didn't need a grubstaker now. She sat there a long time, while memories of other miners who had got rich swarmed in her brain like little devils that fell over each other in their eagerness to stab her: Senator Sherrill, and Tom Potts, the hotel man, and Hooker Bates, who took his flier in Wall Street; and Mike Watson, who divorced his wife for Dora Schoonmaker, and a dozen others. They made their money and then were gathered in by women like the Schoonmakers. She had seen so many of them. They always left the women they had picked up when they were poor. Especially dance hall women. Even when they were their wives.

And she and Jim had never been married.

BUT ROSIE BRIGGS wasn't a quitter. Little in her life had gone by default. When the terms of the sale of the mine had been arranged and everybody in Conifer County knew that Jim was going to be a rich man, she capped his plans with hers and squared about to meet what was coming. She went over her clothes and spruced up as much as she could to match her new station. And very carefully she laid down a program of buying to be carried out as soon as the money came in.

Among her things she found a picture that she had clipped from a fashion magazine twelve years ago—a colored picture of an electric-blue plush dress of a style that she had admired. She felt a twinge of sadness as she wondered how many other things that she had wanted and gone without would look as queer as that now.

The dress she had worn when Jim took her out of the dance hall—the red dress with the spangles on it—looked queerer, but that night while Jim was in the village on an errand after supper she put it on and sat waiting for him by the fire, determined to play such cards as she had.

When he came in he stopped at the door of the little sitting room with a whistle of surprize.

"I ain't seen that for ten years. Didn't know you had it."

"It isn't much—" she said, smoothing the skirt.

She had lengthened and renovated it as best she could. It was the only piece of finery she owned.

"It's all right. Lord, how purty I uster think it was!"

The windows were open to the night. The weather had turned suddenly warm

that day, as if the old earth had decided to start life all over again with the Briggses. There was a moon, and the new tender leaves of the aspens about the cabin made patterns on it that twinkled. You could almost feel the soft wooly anemones thrusting up their oval spear points outside.

The feel of it all had got into Rosie's heart and driven out some of her fears. She even had her old banjo in her lap. She wanted to prove to him that she meant to help him to be happy. She touched the strings and began to sing.

She knew only the songs that had been popular a good while ago—"Daisy", "Two Little Girls in Blue", "Sweet Rosie O'Grady" and one or two more of the same sort. These, to her, were "music"—all there was of it. She sang:

"Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true.
I'm half crazy, just for the love of you" . . .

and felt a load slipping from her heart as the snow slips from the summit of Gray Dome Mountain when warm weather comes.

"Gosh!" Jim murmured. "You ain't sung that sence—"

He let the sentence die. His eyes smiled above his grizzling brown mustache and beard. She wanted to put down the banjo and go to him and touch his hand. But she went on singing, pleased that she remembered the tune so well, that her voice rang out so clear and true, and Jim came and sat close beside her.

A strange, deliciously sweet odor crept in under the smells of growing things and wet earth out there on the dripping mountainside. She felt just then that Jim was as steadfast and as sure to stand by as the huge silver spruce that the cabin was built against. She let her cheek rest on the shoulder of his coat.

"It won't be a stylish marriage,
For I can't afford a carriage . . . "

The odor came more strongly. It was like orange flowers. She smiled at the sentimental notion. Orange flowers on the side of Gray Dome—

"But you'd look sweet—upon the seat
Of a bicycle built—"

The odor came from Jim's coat.

It said suddenly, "Lorraine Schoonmaker," as plainly as Jim's lips could have said it. To smell it was to see the girl standing behind the counter in the Gray Dome Dry Goods Company's store. Probably there was no one in town who would have failed to connect her with that perfume.

A knife seemed to unfold inside of Rosie. It cut her song off in the middle of the line and brought her upright in her chair with a gasp.

"What's the matter?" Jim said, startled.

She got to her feet. She almost came straight out with it. That would have been like her. It was what she wanted to do. But for the first time in many years she was afraid. She stared at Jim with deep revulsion. Suddenly he was part of an elemental horror that she had climbed out of long ago and that now was closing around her again.

"I—I hadn't ought to've sung that," she said thickly. "It—makes me think too much of the old days," and went stumbling off to the bedroom.

He followed her and stood around, saying things to comfort her, and finally she pretended that her mood had passed. But when she lay still at last by his side and thought about Lorraine Schoonmaker, hard lines pulled at the corners of her mouth that hadn't been there for fifteen years. Long after all traces of it had vanished, she fancied that the air was faintly touched with the perfume of orange flowers.

"Women" would have been bad enough, but he would have tired of them and come back. There'd be no coming back from this girl of twenty-one, clever and hard of mind and soft and pink of body, with the first taste of what money could do fresh in her mouth.

Men didn't come back from the Schoonmaker women. Behind Lorraine,

with her sleek black pomaded hair, her short tight pussy willow taffeta one piece gown, her chiffon stockings and high-heeled satin pumps with rhinestone buckles, her vanity case almost as big as a traveling bag, her jeweled wrist watch and swinging bead girdle, Rosie saw Ally Schoonmaker, her older sister, who had married Timothy Bund practically on his death-bed for his house and his shares in the North Star Mine. And behind Ally, up the ladder of the years a rung or two, Dora Schoonmaker, breaking up the Watson home when Mike Watson's mine began to pay, and somehow juggling him into a divorce from the woman who had seen him through the lean grim years of penury and into marriage with her and then carrying him off East. And Effie, the oldest of the four, who had run away with Perce Williams, nearly two decades her junior, when he came into his father's money, and held him grimly to her side ever since.

Yes, and even Bertha Schoonmaker, the mother, with her wig and her dirty chiffon blouses and her painted cheeks and brown teeth and pink-lined hats with floating pink veils, playing the man-game still, at sixty-four. Their lean, rapacious Schoonmaker hands were all alike If Lorraine took Jim, she'd take him to keep. At the altar. For very definite financial ends of her own.

The tacit bargain between Long Jim and Rosie had never got itself into words; they hadn't felt the need of them. He had pulled her out of hell. The strength of her allegiance to him couldn't be increased by the mere saying of words, however sacred, or the giving of a ring. Marriage would have added nothing to her side of it. Nor, she had thought, to his. She wished now that she had it, but it had not occurred to her to wish it before. She had had something so much solider in poverty. Marriage might hold and it might not, but while he had been dependent upon her for his food and clothes, there had been no doubt.

She went back to that over and over that night, seeing the placid years in the little house as very beautiful through a mist of pain. She had a feeling that, pulling at the almost forgotten cadences of the song, she had brought the past down about her ears. She felt the old trapped fatalistic despair and sick rage, without the old vigor. Something began banking up inside of her, steadily, relentlessly. She was terribly afraid of it. It seemed to her that it was a great bubble of black blood in her brain, and that when it burst— She tried to keep from thinking to ease the strain on it, but her thoughts streamed out swiftly from oubliettes in obscure corners of her mind.

They were hideous thoughts and really not hers at all. It seemed that some devil sent them to torture her. The unfairness of it gagged in her throat. She had fought her way out of filth and blackness to cleanness and the sun, and now, without volition, the old horror came on her again from within—clicked through her brain like yards and yards of cinema film. The current of her life had swept past its one clean tranquil place and was swirling along muddied and normal. The familiar ache was in her heart, and Rosie was herself again—Captain Mac, of Al's Dance Hall. You didn't get away from things like that.

Well, there were things that Captain Mac knew how to do that Rosie Briggs had forgotten. She had whipped a can along the street once with revolver bullets as a child whips a hoop, to the admiration of every idle man in town, and ended the demonstration by shooting a stranger's plug hat off his head without disturbing his hair. Her whirling thoughts showed her Jim's old .44 in the left-hand end of the bottom drawer of the dresser.

She must wait, she told herself—and her heart gave a great bound—she must wait until she had them together! She laughed out with sudden raucous cruelty in the still cool night. Jim stirred in his sleep but didn't waken. She raised herself on one elbow and looked down at him, while her thoughts raced and danced, piling themselves into the bubble.

And then it burst and left her weak with compassion, *seeing* them together in her mind's eye; seeing them as clearly as the daylight that was climbing over Gray Dome Mountain. That fragile, empty, smart little thing and Long Jim Briggs! Gaunt, weathered, grizzled old Jim—and her! She'd no more be able to shoot than to enter into her dead mother's womb and be born again.

Feeling as old as the granite hills that ramparted the cañon, and with something too of their plain ineluctable dignity, she arose and dressed herself and built the breakfast fire in the stove.

When Jim came out to her she got slowly to her feet, closed the damper and faced him.

"Jim," she said, "that girl don't want you. Take a good look at yourself in the mirror over there, and then think of her. She'll throw you away like a sucked orange when the money's gone."

Long Jim Briggs stood up with his head in the rafters of the tiny room and stared like an idiot.

"I smelled her perfumery on your coat," said Rosie shortly, and comprehension dawned slowly in his face.

"Holy jumping June bugs!" he said from somewhere down in his boots. "So *that's* what you thought! Wait a minute. I was hidin' it in the wood house. I wanted to surprize you."

In a moment he returned with a package. With awkward swift movements he ripped off the wrapping paper and shook out the folds of a brilliant electric blue plush dress of a fashion fallen into forgotten desuetude ten years before.

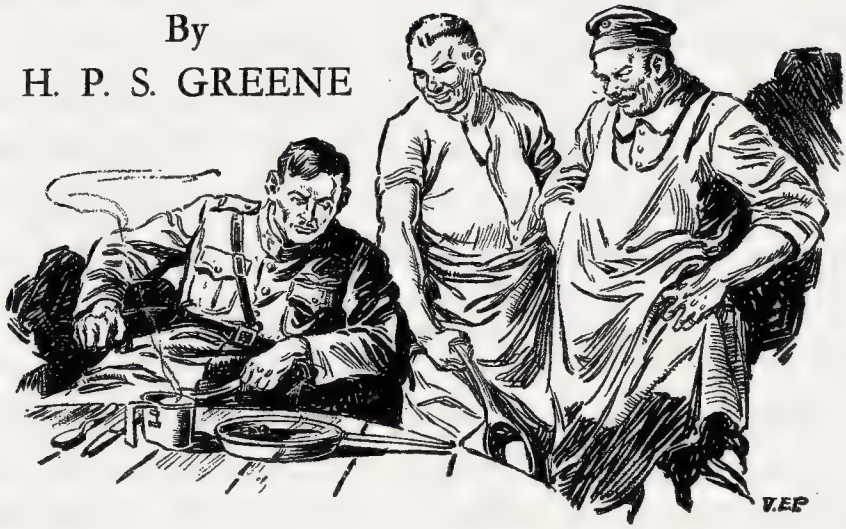
He displayed it pridefully down the front of his long person, head a-cock and a twinkle in his eye.

"That's all there was between us! Smell it!" The room reeked of orange blossoms. "She made it for me nights, to make some extra money. It's the kind you kep' a picture of from a fashion book. I got it off your dresser. Do you—do you like it, Rosie?"

She tried to speak, but could only nod her head. He patted her shoulder awkwardly. The dress swam before her eyes like a pane of blue glass in the rain.

"It's goin' to be the swellest weddin'," he said huskily, "that little old Gray Dome ever seen. An' then—" he cleared his throat with a rumble like summer thunder—"we're goin' to Denver an' buy a house on Capitol Hill an' the finest auto in town, an' a nigger to run it an' drive around an' tell 'em all to go to hell!"

By
H. P. S. GREENE



The story of a flying lieutenant who went A.W.O.L.

IN LINE *of* DUTY

A HEAVY TRUCK lumbered slowly along a road in central France. On both sides of the road was an uninspiring vista of brown fields, stretching away as far as the eye could reach, and only occasionally broken by small clumps of small scrubby trees. On the seat of the truck beside the driver sat a little man with a drooping mustache. This droopiness was evidence that he had come there by way of Paris. When he reached the French capital the mustache had been smartly waxed.

Finally he addressed the driver out of sheer boredom.

"Pretty sad dump around here, ain't it?" he remarked obviously.

"Sad?" inquired the truck driver, a horse faced man with a large bulge in his cheek, who suggested mules rather than mechanical means of locomotion. "Sad? Say, Lieutenant, you ain't seen *nuthin'* yet! Wait till you see the flyin' field. They have to lay duckboards to get out to the airyplanes on. The only birds who have a good time around there are the Dutchmen—prisoners, you know. I took 'em out a load of beer and cognac this morning, and there was a hardboiled M.P. sergeant ridin' the load to make sure it all got there, an' it did, too. And then the lucky suckers work in the kitchen and get all they want to eat, too—the Dutch, I mean. Makes me sick to think o' them krauts lyin' around with nuthin' to do but stuff an' guzzle, while hard workin' guys like me— Look, there's the field now."

He pointed ahead to a group of low

barrack buildings which clustered near the road on the left hand side. Farther away could be seen several hangars, but no signs of activity.

"I don't see any flying going on," remarked the lieutenant, whose name was Tommy Lang.

"No, an' you won't prob'ly, till next spring," returned the driver.

He turned off the rough but hard road through the gateway into the camp, and the engine of the truck began to labor as its wheels sank deep into the soft mud, so he shifted into second. Once more the truck lurched forward, but only for a moment. The driver shifted back into first, but the new impetus gained was only temporary, and presently the chainless wheels spun vainly. The driver shut off his motor and climbed to the ground.

"This is as far as we can go, Lieutenant," he said. "You'll have to lug your own baggage in from here. The frogs won't let us use chains on the road, so they took 'em away from us."

He proceeded around to the back of the truck and let down the tailboard with a bang. Tommy climbed down gingerly, but immediately sank almost to his knees. The driver was dragging out his bed roll and trunk, which fell to the ground with a squashy sound; then he went around to the front of the truck and began to labor at the crank.

"What do I do now?" asked Tommy, looking around.

There wasn't another soul anywhere in sight.

"Report to the personnel officer up there," answered the driver, waving his arm vaguely toward the row of long barrack buildings nearby. So saying, he climbed once more to the seat and began to churn his way backward toward firmer ground.

LEAVING the sad monument of his baggage, Tommy sloughed through the mud until he reached a pathway of duckboards which ran parallel to the row of barracks. On one of these buildings was a sign, and as he approached it, the latest addition to the great American flying field was able to see that it read as follows:

PERSONNEL OFFICE
for
OFFICERS
FLYING OFFICERS
FLYING CADETS
CADETS

"And the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats," thought Tommy as he climbed a short flight of steps and entered the office. The shepherd, a small, pot bellied man with captain's bars but no wings on his serge blouse, eyed the newest flying lieutenant, his whipcord uniform and his papers with disfavor.

"All right," he said in a querulous voice. "Find yourself a bunk in the flying officers' barrack. You will be assigned to a section for duty. Look on the bulletin board in the operations office."

Tommy saluted and went out. He saw his baggage still forming an island in the sea of mud, but it seemed to have shrunk appreciably since he left it. He had an idea that he must salvage it before it disappeared entirely.

Walking along the duckboard, he heard a chorus of voices raised in ribald song in one of the barracks and stopped, feeling that he had reached a friendly haven.

"When I joined the Army I was clean and neat,
Now—"

The noise ceased abruptly as the flying officer entered.

"Attention!" shouted one voice.

"Ma-a-a-a-ah!" said another.

The place was full of irreverent and antagonistic cadets, and Tommy retreated, feeling that it was not the time to stop and explain that the only reason he was not among them was through the mistake of some nodding Homer in Washington in giving him a commission as soon as he enlisted, instead of when he got his pilot's license. The song followed him:

"The officers live on the top of the hill,
The flying cadets in the slush and the swill—
I don't want any more Army.
Gee, how I want to go home."

He came to the last barrack of all, which was only about three-fourths built. Going inside, he found it empty of human life, but the contents was reassuring. Under the neatly spread double-decker bunks were officers' boots, and the walls were covered with overcoats bearing the single stripe of a first lieutenant, and with various flying clothes and equipment. In what would be the middle of the long building was a single large stove which feebly radiated its rays of heat against the blasts of cold damp air from the open end. Near that end were several unoccupied bunks, one of which Tommy decided must be for him.

IT WAS commencing to get dark outside, and colder, too. The little flyer huddled closer to the stove and smoked a cigaret. Somebody must come in before long. Somebody did.

There was a clatter on the duckboards outside and a horde of flying lieutenants trouped in, making loud noises and crowding around the stove. Tommy scanned their faces anxiously, but there was nobody there he knew. A tall, thin man eyed him in a friendly manner, and Tommy asked him to help him with his baggage. The other assented readily, and they excavated the large French trunk and fancy bed roll which marked a man who had enlisted in Paris, and one by one dragged them inside.

"You might as well take this bunk next to me and Fat," said the tall man, who was known as Long John. "We got left behind for a day in Paris by accident, and when we got here the barrack was almost full up, so we had to take bunks near the end. What ground school did you go to?"

"I never went to ground school," returned Tommy. "I was an ambulance driver and enlisted in Paris."

He looked around curiously at his companions in the barrack. They were of an unfamiliar genus, men who had had their preliminary training and got their commissions in the States.

There were various strange divisions in the early days of the Air Service in France. At the French school at Tours there were, outwardly at least, several different breeds of Americans. First the Foreign Legion trained there, and then a lost or strayed detachment of American gobs. Then the Army started enlisting men in Paris, mostly former ambulance drivers, who continued the old feud between the American Ambulance and Norton Harjes, but united in scorn for those whose service had been confined to the Mexican Border.

Then one day a body of men marched into camp in column of fours, a military evolution which the ambulance drivers regarded with pitying contempt.

"Who are those men?" the question ran around.

"Ground school men," was the reply, and the ex-ambulanciers immediately joined together in one clique against the others.

Now Tommy was meeting a new division in the ranks of the flyers—those who had not only been to ground school, but had had preliminary flying training in the States.

He inquired after various of his friends, only to find that they had been transferred to a more advanced field; and, realizing that more than an hour still remained before supper, he started down the road toward a house he had noticed when the truck brought him to the field. Perhaps he might find a drink there, and possibly some one he knew. He was cold and shivering and thought longingly of the woolen underwear sent him by an aunt, which was buried in his trunk. For years he had worn nothing but so-called athletic underwear, but the time had evidently come to change.

He approached the house, a solitary farm, but still somehow suggestive of liquid refreshment. The door stood open hospitably, and he walked in. His nose had not deceived him, for though there was no one in the room, a small bar stood along one end, and when the gnarled, stooped lady of the establishment came in, he ordered a glass of rum. The strong liquor warmed him.

There was a puttering roar outside, and a motorcycle pulled up at the door. Tommy observed the evident agitation of the Madame with surprise. Then a man with a hard face came inside. He looked at Tommy threateningly.

"Have a drink," invited the little pilot in friendly tones.

He hated to drink alone, even if he was cold. The other, who wore a brassard around his arm like a stretcher bearer in the French army, agreed in a surly manner. Tommy wondered who the fellow was as he gulped his drink, and waited to see if the other would return the compliment, as was in vogue in those days. He didn't, and Tommy turned to leave.

"Hey, feller," said the surly one. "Guess I'll have another one."

"Sure, if you like," answered Tommy, surprised.

He ordered and paid for another round. There was something peculiar here that he didn't understand. Just then there was the sound of another motorcycle outside.

"The officer of the day!" exclaimed the tough man with the arm band, rushing out. Tommy heard his voice raised placatingly.

"Yes, sir," it said. "I just went in to see if there was anybody inside, but there was no one there."

"All right, get on with the patrol," said another voice.

The two motorcycles roared away. Tommy was bewildered. He left the café and walked back to the barrack. Perhaps he could find out there what it all meant. Although he bore lieutenant's bars on his shoulders, he was as innocent of the Army and its ways as a baby.

AT THE open ended barrack he found the flying lieutenants gathered around the stove. Among them was Long John, and he singled him out and told him his queer story. To Tommy's surprise he burst into raucous laughter.

"Hey, Fat! Hey, guys! Listen to this, will ya! This bird goes up the road to the café that's out of bounds, and when the M.P. comes in he asks him to have a drink."

Chorus—

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. And then he wonders why the M.P. don't buy him one."

"No!"

"Fact, and then the M.P. tells him to buy another one, and he does!"

"Yeah?"

"And then the officer of the day drives up, and the M.P. tells him there's nobody in there, and they ride off, and now this bird wants to know what it's all about!"

A howl of glee went up, and from that moment Tommy became a marked man at Issy-la-Boue, as he had a habit of doing everywhere he went.

A bugle blew at this juncture and all the flying officers rushed to their bunks and seized peculiar looking instruments with which they went outside. Still wondering, Tommy followed them.

IT WAS dark by that time, but he could see them trouping into a brightly lighted building, and he followed. There they had formed in line, and were approaching a counter behind which stood cropheaded fat men who were ladling out what Tommy's nose told him was food.

As they were served the flyers hurried away to seat themselves on long benches at bare wooden tables and wolf their meal. Tommy accosted the large man whom Long John had addressed as Fat, whose bulk had evidently cut down his speed so that he was near to the end of the line.

"Say," he asked, "where do I get some of those things they eat out of?"

"What, ain't you got no messkit?" queried Fat. "You'll have to draw one in the morning. For tonight you'd better borrow Long John's. He's always in the head of the line when the doors open, and he eats faster than any man in the outfit. But where have you been in the Army not to have a messkit?"

"We always ate in the canteen at the

French flying school until the Y. M. C. A. came along and closed it up because they served wine there," answered Tommy. "They made a speech about the evils of drink and were going to serve chocolate instead, but the chocolate never came. After that we generally ate at the Greasy Spoon across the road, because they didn't serve anything but boiled beef and boiled potatoes at the mess hall, but even there they furnished dishes."

"Well, you'll get no dishes furnished here," said Fat. "But look, there goes Long John already. Follow him out to the tubs, and get his messkit when he gets through washing it."

Tommy trailed the tall man out into the cold, dark night, where several dim forms could be seen and heard slopping around near two large tubs on the ground. As John rose from his task and shook his tools in lieu of wiping them, Tommy accosted him and borrowed the messkit. Then he rushed back into the mess hall just in time to get the last of the slum. He eyed the German K. P.'s with some misgiving.

It occurred to him that it would be a fine opportunity for some patriotic Boche to wash out the American Air Service by a judicious application of ground glass or rough-on-rats, but he ate the slum, which was fairly good, though Teutonically greasy.

Then he went outside to the tubs, where the late eaters were still trying to wash their utensils. By this time the water was stone cold, and full of fragments of food. Cries for more hot *Wasser* rent the air, but the German K. P.'s only stood in their warm kitchen and laughed, and made guttural and doubtless insulting remarks in reply. After the iron discipline of their own army, they were tickled pink at the opportunity to insult any kind of officer, even an American aviator, who was the lowest of the low. Tommy wiped most of the grease out of his dish with his handkerchief and then returned the mess kit to Long John at the barrack with an apology.

THE TALL MAN and Fat were about to start for the operations room to find out the schedule for the next day, and invited Tommy to come along. On the bulletin board he found that he had been assigned to Section 13. Various other changes in sections were posted, but the last one took his eye. It read:

1st. Lieut. John Smith, A. S. S. O. R. C.
Transferred from Section 3 to Death in Line of Duty.
by order of
—HERMAN KRAUSE, MAJOR, SIGNAL CORPS.

"What's the idea ordering some guy to 'Death in Line of Duty'?" he asked Long John.

"Huh? Oh, they always do that when some bird gets bumped," answered the tall man. "You're in Section 13, same as me. We go to rotary motors in the morning, and then machine gun."

"What do you mean, rotary motors?" inquired Tommy.

"Oh, they've got one of these Le Rhone motors like they have in the Nieuports mounted on a block over at the hangars, and some goof gives a lecture about it, and then we practise twiddling the little levers—'manettes', they call 'em—that make it go. We've had it four or five times already. They always give it to us when they can't think of anything else for us to do."

"But I've flown hundreds of miles with rotary motors," Tommy exclaimed. "I made all my *voyages* and my altitude test for my brevet with them."

"Never mind that," returned Long John. "You'll probably have all the more lectures about 'em on that account."

They returned to the barrack, and Tommy started to unpack his things. From his bed roll he produced a pair of rubber boots, made in such a close imitation of regulation officers' boots that it took a close inspection to see that they weren't the real article.

"What a trick for roll call mornings," exclaimed Fat, looking at them enviously. "You know we have roll call at six o'clock, and then we have to wait until

seven for breakfast. Most of the fellows just put on boots and overcoats to stand the call, and then come back to bed again. You can pull those things on in a minute and get by with them."

"A good idea," proclaimed Tommy, and went to bed with that idea in mind. He was going to dig out his heavy underwear that night, but decided that it was too cold, and that he would do it in the morning.

MEANWHILE there was another conference going on at headquarters. Major Krause, the commanding officer of the field, a red faced, apoplectic man, whose military heroes were Frederick the Great and Baron von Steuben, was roaring at the adjutant, his "yes man".

"Here they are," he bellowed, "sending us another squadron of mechanics, when we haven't got half enough room or work for the ones we have now. I don't know what we'll do with them. We'll have to try to pry another of those folding barracks out of the French. And they have no officers, and neither have we, though there's a whole camp full of young fools with commissions around here. But we'll have to pick out one of them to command the squadron, just to sign the reports that go in. Have you anybody to suggest?"

"Well," said the adjutant, "here's a man got in today named Lang, whose commission dates back to September, earlier than most of the others, but I don't know anything about him."

"I know too much about most of the others," said Major Krause. "Give him a trial. Perhaps he may know something about his military duties. By the way, did you tell the commanding officer of those officers in the unfinished barrack that if they wanted it finished they could do it themselves?"

"Yes, sir, and they said they hadn't got cards to the Flying Carpenters' Union, and they didn't give a damn whether it was finished or not. They kicked a lot about having to go out and pick up stones off the flying field in full uniform, too, because the German prisoners stood around and laughed at them."

"They did, did they?" roared Major Krause. "What they need is discipline, and I'm going to give it to them! Tell Captain Yuma to give them an hour's close order drill every morning after roll call."

"Yes, sir," said the adjutant with satisfaction.

NEXT MORNING Tommy woke with a start. He was cold and cramped from the night on the narrow bunk with insufficient blankets, and for a moment he thought that he was back in the ambulance sleeping on a stretcher. Then he saw the other flyers rushing out of the barrack and realized where he was. He rolled quickly out of his bunk, dragged on the rubber boots, shuffled into his trench coat, which barely covered his bare knees, grabbed his hat and ran out after them, only to slip and come tumbling out of the barrack head first, amid hoarse guffaws from the other sufferers lined up outside. It had snowed a couple of inches during the night, and the sharp flakes bit into his tender knees. He scrambled to his feet and lined up with the rest.

The short, fat captain to whom he had reported the day before called the roll in his squeaky voice, and then at the top of his lungs cried—

"Squads right!"

A horrified look ran up and down the scantily clad ranks, but the "March!" followed grimly and inevitably. The captain, who had been a real estate broker two short months before, had forgotten to have them call off, and they broke into a milling mob.

"As you were!" he howled.

The ranks formed again, after a considerable delay, during which several men tried to sneak around the corner of the barrack, and the captain finally got them marched away. To Tommy, as well as to the late realtor, and most of the rest, it was a doleful hike. With every step, the man in front scuffed snow and

equally cold mud up against his bare, raw knees, and soon his boots were full.

In other parts of the great field where they marched there were other processions of unfortunates, one of flying cadets, one of cadets, and also several companies of mechanics. They, however, had the advantage of expecting the march, and were fully dressed. Most of the flying lieutenants were not. But at last it came to an end, and in the doubtful shelter of the barrack once more Tommy wiped the mud from his cold wet knees with a towel.

"Where can I take a bath?" he asked Long John.

John cackled with raucous glee.

"Bath?" he snorted. "Hey, guys, here's an *hombre* wants to know where he can take a bath."

"Bath?" said Fat. "Why, Paris is the last place I had a bath, and I don't expect to have another one till I die and go back there. You'll get no baths here. There's a bath-house in town, but you can't go there, for the post's been quarantined ever since it was started. The M.P.'s know that anybody that goes A. W. O. L. will want a bath, so they keep a special guard over the bath-house to pick you up, just like at the barrooms."

They dressed, went to the mess hall for beans, washed their mess kits, and then formed in sections to march to classes. First Section 13 spent an hour standing around in the blast from the propeller of a rotary motor, and then went to an unheated barrack to handle the icy parts of a Lewis machine gun. After which they were allowed to escape to the Red Cross hut and buy some hot coffee. Hardly had they reached this haven when an orderly entered.

"Lieutenant Lang," he bawled. "Is Lieutenant Lang here?"

Tommy took an envelope addressed to him, signed for it and opened it with apprehension. This was well justified, for the letter told him to assume command of the 946th Aero Squadron upon its arrival at the field. He showed it to Fat and Long John, who once more burst into laughter.

"Can you imagine the lucky little stiff?" John inquired of the world in general. "Here's a guy knows so little about the Army that he doesn't even know an M.P. when he sees one, and here he gets command of a squadron. You'll get out of reveille and standing morning formation on that, and have an orderly to shine your boots for you. You can have them build off a separate room for you in their barrack with a stove in it. Pretty soft for a squadron commander, I'll say."

"But what will I command them to do?" Tommy asked anxiously.

"Let Old Krause and the adjutant worry about that," returned John. "They'll find plenty of commands for you. But turn everything over to your top sergeant and make him do it. Tell him, 'Look here, Sergeant, if you won't bother me, I won't bother you.' Then all you have to do is look wise and sign the papers that the sergeant-major or staff sergeant bring you, and keep out of Krause's way."

WHEN the squadron arrived Tommy followed John's half joking advice and found that it succeeded admirably. The men partitioned off one end of the barrack after they got it up, and there made an office for the sergeant-major and one for Tommy, in which he set up a G. M. cot. Of course, this office had to have a stove, and so it served splendidly for quiet games of stud which continued long after lights were out in the quarters of the flying lieutenants less fortunate than Tommy and his cronies. And he got along well in his command by keeping out of sight, and signing unquestioningly the morning reports, rosters, ration reports and whatnots his sergeants brought him.

But one morning the sergeant-major approached him with a troubled face.

"I don't know what to do about this, Lieutenant," he said, holding out a letter. "I sent it to the adjutant three times and he always sends it back marked 'Incorrect.' You see, they have held up Corporal Letar's pay on account of a tailors'

bill against him for twenty-five cents for repairing his breeches at Shenannigan Field, Texas. Now here is his service record, and it shows a deduction of a quarter made there in July for fixing his breeches, and he says that's the only time he ever had it done, but they've been holding up his pay for three months."

"Holding up his pay, have they?" said Tommy angrily. "Sent the letter back three times? We'll see about that. I'll take it up to the adjutant myself."

He entered the adjutant's office and spoke loudly:

"Say, what's all this, about Corporal Letar's pants? Here's the letter all O. K.—just as his service record shows. 'Twenty-five cents was deducted from Corporal Letar's pay in July at Shenannigan Field, Texas, for repairing his pants.' "

"Ah, that's what's wrong," replied the adjutant smoothly. "Where's your grammar? Haven't you ever been to school? What you should say is: 'Twenty-five cents *were* deducted from Corporal Letar's pay at Shenannigan Field, Texas—' "

"What's this?" burst an angry roar from an inner office, as Major Krause rushed out. "What's all this about pants? Who's this talking about pants? Don't you know there's no such thing in the United States Army as pants? Who are you, young man?"

Tommy stood speechless at the outburst. Why, oh why, hadn't he kept on following Long John's advice about keeping out of sight?

"This is Lieutenant Lang, sir," said the adjutant silkily, "the commanding officer of the 946th Aero Squadron on this Post. We were discussing a very serious error in one of his reports."

"Oh, it is, is it?" said Major Krause angrily. "I was going to send for you. I issued orders that all commanding officers of organizations on this post should personally give their units an hour's close order drill every morning. Yesterday morning I saw a sergeant drilling your squadron. Where were you, sir? Why weren't you drilling them yourself?"

"Why," blurted Tommy, "I don't know how to drill 'em. I never drilled anybody in my life!"

"What? You, a commissioned officer in the United States Army, stand there and admit that you are not capable of drilling the men under your command? Well, sir, you are hereby relieved from that command. Remove yourself and your belongings from the 946th Squadron's barrack at once, to make room for your successor. And, young man, remember this: Never give 'You don't know how' as an excuse in the United States Army. If you don't *know* how, *learn* how! If you get an order, do it, and if you can't do it, do as near it as you can. That will do. You may go."

TOMMY dragged himself away disconsolately, and had a couple of men of his late command carry his stuff back to the barrack with the open end. It was colder than ever now, after the warm quarters from which he had been ousted. But on the other hand, perhaps this was a blessing in disguise. He had been flying lately, and had graduated from the penguins whose wings were too short to fly, and from the gawky twenty-three meter Nieuports, and now he was on the eighteens.

He ought to be finished with them soon, and then he would be due to move away from the main field to Field 5 for the smaller, faster fifteen meter machines. Perhaps there would have been some hitch about going if he'd been hooked up with the squadron, but now he could leave as soon as he was ready.

And he was ready to go somewhere, too. He'd now been quarantined at Issy-la-Boue for over a month and hadn't been able to leave the post for a bath. If it wasn't the measles or the mumps it was the chicken pox, or somebody had a sore toe. There was a spreading line of red blotches around his waist, and he knew only too well what it was. The scabies! And from his experience with the French he knew there was only one cure—hot sulphur baths with a scrubbing brush, and

plenty of them. They had them at the bath-house in town, but he couldn't get away. However, perhaps something would turn up; it always did, sooner or later.

It did the next day. He finished flying early, and returned to the barrack. As he came in, the telephone rang and he answered. An excited voiced called:

"Hello, is this the Main Field? This is Field 5. Tommy Lang just crashed here in an eighteen."

"Hah?" said Tommy.

"Yeah, deader'n a doornail, too. The whole top of his head's gone above the eyes. An awful mess. The only way we knew who it was was by his mustache."

The spreader of bad news hung up, leaving Tommy dazed. He pinched himself to make sure that he was alive. It must be Phil who had crashed. He had a mustache like Tommy's own, but he was about six feet tall, while Tommy was nearer five. However, no doubt he had been crumpled up like an accordion in the fall. Then Tommy had another thought. He seized the telephone receiver and called the adjutant.

LATER that evening when the orderly came to the operations office with notices for the bulletin board Tommy was waiting for him. An hour later found him luxuriating in a hot sulphur bath in the town of Issy-la-Boue. He had caught a ride on a French truck from the field, and there had been no M.P.'s on duty when he went in. When he came out there were two near the door, but the night was pitch dark, and they were wrangling about something—a girl, apparently—and he passed unnoticed. Then he sought a hotel.

The madame in charge was cordial and voluble.

But yes, she had plenty of room. That *sale guerre!* There were hardly any commercial travelers nowadays. And then that *salaud* of a chief American gendarme who spent nothing himself, and forbade her hotel to other brave Americans who would! Indeed, he had closed all the cafés and hotels in town to his countrymen, and opened a café of his own, importing two *petites femmes* from Paris to run it for him. But there was another American officer—a man very distinguished—at her hotel who appeared lonesome. Perhaps this worthy monsieur would like to join him.

She led Tommy to a small office of some sort, wherein a man in American uniform was sitting gloomily alone before a bottle of wine. The little pilot recoiled at sight of the gold leaves on his shoulders, but it wasn't Major Krause who sat there. On this major's blouse were the Legion of Honor, the *Medaille Militaire*, and the *Croix de Guerre* with many palms, instead of the jingling hardware Krause carried to show that he was a marksman or something; and this man's face lit up with a welcoming smile, instead of the congested dignity habitual with the commanding officer of the flying field of Issy-la-Boue. Tommy gasped as he realized that he was in the presence of the great ace himself!

He sat down at the other's invitation and had a glass of wine. They joined in lamenting the fact that they couldn't hang all M.P.'s on the meat-hooks in front of butcher shops as the *poilus* did the gendarmes at Verdun, and agreed that the French are a great people.

"Look at me," said the ace gloomily. "When I took this commission I had no idea that they were going to order me away from the front, but now all the others are killing more Boches and getting ahead of me while I rot in this hole. They sent me back here to help train you fellows, but Major Krause wouldn't pay any attention to what I said, so I left. I heard some guy who had never flown over the front give you a lecture on how to do it, and when he said that if you got lost over Germany the way to find out where you were was to fly down and read the name on some railway station, I couldn't bear it any more. I don't know what the devil to do—I'm not doing any good around here."

His gloom was justified. A few months

later he was shot down in flames in a machine condemned by the French.

They heard the voice of the madame raised in loud objurgations outside, but there was a knock at the door, and immediately a man entered. He wore the uniform of a first lieutenant, and on his arm the brassard of an M.P. But his truculence subsided into oiliness at the sight of the major's leaves.

"Excuse me, Major," he said, "but orders are very strict, you know. Major Krause is very particular that no flying officer should leave the post under any conditions. I beg your pardon, Lieutenant, but have you got a pass?"

"He's with me," said the ace shortly.

"Oh," said the M.P. uncertainly, and went out. He wasn't sure exactly what the ace's status was, but his rank was plain enough, and the M.P. was afraid of burning his fingers.

"Wait till that guy catches me alone," said Tommy.

"Stick around with me," said the ace. "Krause doesn't quite know what to do about me yet, for I've got a pull in Paris, and he's let me alone since I left the field."

FOR THREE DAYS Tommy did stick, and lived the life of Riley, sleeping in a good bed, eating good meals, drinking good wine and taking sulphur baths twice a day. At the end of that time his scabies was gone.

"I guess I'd better be getting back to the field," he told the ace. "I want to get through there and get to the front. I took an awful chance going A. W. O. L, but maybe my little scheme will work on Krause. If it doesn't, and he takes me off flying I'll be sunk. Think I might as well go out and let that M.P. pick me up and give me a ride back to camp."

He shook hands with the ace, and walked out and down the street alone.

He hadn't gone far when a Ford drew up beside him and stopped. In the front seat was the M.P. lieutenant, and behind a hard-boiled sergeant with a .45.

"Hey," said the lieutenant in rough tones, "let's see your pass."

"I ain't got a pass," the little man returned.

"All right, then, you're under arrest. Get in here, and I'll take you out to the field."

Tommy obeyed meekly, and they rode along without conversation. Presently he was ushered into the presence of Major Krause.

"What?" growled the major. "In town without a pass, eh? What have you got to say for yourself, young man?"

"Well," Tommy replied, "the other day you told me never to question an order in the Army, and if I couldn't obey an order to come as near it as I could."

"What rigamarole is this?" asked Major Krause angrily. "Do you mean to stand there and tell me I ordered you to go A. W. O. L?"

"Not exactly, sir," answered Tommy respectfully, "but you see this order here. I couldn't see my way clear to carry it out, so I thought I'd better leave here so as not to embarrass you."

Major Krause looked at the paper Tommy extended and his eyes goggled. His face became more congested than ever, and wrinkles corrugated his brow. What could he do? If he court-martialed this young idiot this order would undoubtedly be his defense, and Krause's dignity, a carefully tended hothouse plant of uncertain virility, could hardly survive. So he waved his arms in a furious gesture of dismissal and gurgled like an active volcano, and Tommy saluted and left discreetly.

The paper he had given Krause read:

1st. Lieut. Thomas Lang, A. S. S. O. R. C.
Transferred from Section 13 to Death in Line of Duty by order,
—HERMAN KRAUSE, MAJOR, SIGNAL CORPS.

SAILMAKER

By Bill Adams

OLD man Stitch-away, old man Sails,
With his long gray beard, he's as hard as nails.
His teeth are yellow and his eyes are gray,
And he's seaming and he's roping all the livelong day.
Stitch away, stitch away, sew them strong
For the lofty spars where they belong.
Rope them tight and seam them true
So never a capful of wind blows through;
A big ship's topsails, a big ship's courses,
Royals and skysails, a big ship's wings
To race her along through the wild white horses,
To lift her high where the comber swings.
Stitch them, Sails; aye, sew them tight
For the mad squall blowing in the maniac night;
Sew them to stand the beat of hail,
The lash of rain and the hurricane's flail;
Sew them strong so they'll never rip
When we're bow to bow with a rival ship;
Bolt on bolt of canvas high to tower in a pyramid to the sky;
Bolt on bolt of canvas wide to cast swift shadows on the blue sea's tide;
Bolt on bolt of canvas white to gleam in the glory of the tropic night.
And if there's a little bit of sail left over,
Save it, Sails, for a fellow rover!
Old man Sails with his gray head bowed,
He's sitting and he's stitching at a dead man's shroud.

The MAN *Who* HATED HIMSELF

By WALT COBURN

EVERY stockman in the northwest recalls the hard winter of '86-'87. It broke most of them. One cattleman, spending his winter in the South, wrote back to his ranch to inquire how his stuff was wintering. His line rider took a pencil and drew the picture of a starving cow hung up in the drifts. Under it he wrote:

Waiting for a chinook. The last of the five thousand.

The man who drew that picture was Charlie Russell, the daddy of them all when it came to putting the cow and the horse and the Indian and the cowpuncher on canvas or in clay. But in '86 Charlie was a cowpuncher.

This is not a story about Charlie Russell. He is mentioned no more in the tale. I speak of him here because when a cowman of Montana recalls the winter of '86 he invariably mentions that picture of Charlie Russell's as an illustration for his tale of hardship. It tells better than any words the bitter curse of that hard winter.

The Circle C outfit made their last shipment of steers along about the first of November that fall. It was spitting snow when they finished loading. The cattle train pulled out for Chicago. The boys rode back to where the roundup wagon was camped on Main Alkali. They gulped down hot food and black coffee, caught out their town horses and headed for Malta.

As they jogged along the road with their ears tied up with silk handkerchiefs, heads bent against the raw wind, big Buck Bell rode up alongside the wagon boss.

"Winter's done come, Horace," grunted Buck, fashioning a cigaret with numbing fingers.

"Shore has," returned Horace, humped across his saddle horn.

"Makes a man wonder what's become of his summer's wages," Buck led up to his subject.

Horace nodded a trifle absently. He was wondering how he'd get his mess wagon loaded and started for the ranch before the cook got too drunk to handle his four lines.

"How's chances fer a winter's job ridin' line, Horace?" Buck tried to keep the eager tremor out of his voice.

A powerful story of the Montana cattle trails and the Great Blizzard of '86

"We're full handed fer the winter, Bell. You should 'a' tackled me a month ago."

"A month ago," said Buck Bell with grim humor, "I was fatter'n a bear in berry season. Had a thousand dollars. Had a idee I was a top hand at draw poker. The nighthawk took me fer my roll."

This story of tough luck was not a new one to the ears of the wagon boss. It is a tale as old as the oldest cow hand. Horace, still thinking of the cook, missed the flicker of disappointment in Buck Bell's snow bitten eyes. He failed to see the beaten droop of the big boned shoulders inadequately clothed in a soiled flannel shirt and two undershirts. Buck didn't own an overcoat. His boots were rusty and he kicked his toes against his stirrups as he rode, by way of restoring circulation.

"LOOKS like when a man begun gittin' white headed," said Horace as they dropped down the ridge toward town, "he'd have sense enough to save a winter stake."

He did not mean to be unkind. There wasn't a mean drop of blood in the cow boss's veins. He was sorry for Buck Bell and hid his softer emotions under the words he now mumbled into the upturned collar of a threadbare coat. Truthfully speaking, Horace himself was prodi-

gal as the rest of the cowpuncher clan.

Buck took a last pull at the bit of stub of cigaret and threw it away. Then he chuckled softly. They were riding down the lane that approached town. To the left of them was the Malta graveyard, the wooden slabs whitening with the first snow.

"What struck you as bein' so comical, Buck?"

"Just thinkin' how them boys planted in yonder boothill don't need worry no more about winter jobs and coonskin coats they ain't got the coin to buy. I kin name three-four that I bet is plenty warm where they went."

They rode into town and put their horses in the feed barn. The stalls were filling with Circle C horses. There was an unwritten law of the outfit that a man must stable his horse before he got drunk.

Over at Dick Powell's place the boys were paid off. Dick, saloon man and sheriff, voiced his friendly warning.

"The town's your'n, boys, Take care of 'er."

The hard earned money went into swift circulation. The tin horn gamblers opened up their games. Bartenders set up free drinks at proper intervals to the laughing, cussing, free handed men who lined the bar and swapped yarns and thawed out.

Boot heels clicked on the pine board floors. Spurs jingled along the streets.

"Can't spend'er all in one place."

They moved along to the next saloon. Crumpled banknotes lay along the bar. The men greeted old friends. Jovial bartenders, most of them old time cowpunchers, wiped right hands on soiled aprons and voiced profane welcome.

Fiddles squeaked above the voices loosened by the whisky. Tin pan pianos banged. Lights defied the coming dusk of early night. There would be no night guard to stand tonight. No long circle to ride in the early dawn. While their money lasted these cowboys owned the town.

Buck Bell found the nighthawk sitting in a monte game.

"Here's that fifty dollars you still got comin', Cotton Eye."

The nighthawk looked up, grinned and shook his head.

"To hell with you an' your fifty, Buck. Pay me half when you die. The rest when you come back. I'm winnin' off this gamblin' man."

Buck grunted an indistinct thanks and clumped up to the bar.

"A little red licker, Dick. Give the boys what they want. Wake up that sheepherder in the corner and tell the gentleman that ol' Buck Bell is in town. I'm a red eyed wolf from Bitter Crick and it's my night to howl." Whereupon he howled long and loud with a quivering, high keyed sadness in his voice.

"SEE YOU later," Buck said as he moved on out and along the street.

The wind moaned darkly down the lonesome lane between the rows of saloons and stores. He stood with bowed legs spread wide, thumbs hung in his sagging cartridge belt, leaning a little against the storm. His howl was blotted out in a flurry of snow that was ushering in the long winter. Buck felt sad in spite of the dozen drinks under his belt. Sad and lonesome and restless. He belonged down in Texas and he was a long way from home. He had aimed to go back home this winter, wearing store clothes and with coin in his pockets. But Cotton Eye had cleaned him. He crossed over to Long Henry's and was promptly pulled up to the bar by several celebrants. Buck tossed out a ten dollar bill with the air of a man who scorns money. Somebody was singing "Sam Bass".

"Sam Bass" is a ballad that extolls the deeds of that notorious Texas outlaw. The old time outlaw has always held a place in the hearts of the cowpunchers. His vices are buried, his virtues, real or imaginary, live on in cowland saga.

"Sam first came to Texas a cowboy for to be—
A kinder hearted feller you seldom ever see!"

Buck Bell twirled his whisky glass between thumb and forefinger. The singer had a good voice and his audience

was mellow and prone to the sentiment that has to do with white haired mothers, golden haired sweethearts and generosity of dying outlaws.

"Sam met his fate at Round Rock, July the twenty-first;
They pierced poor Sam with rifle balls and emptied out his purse.

"Jim had borrowed Sam's good gold and didn't want to pay,
So the only shot he saw, was to give poor Sam away.
He sold out Sam . . ."

Buck Bell nodded at his dim reflection in the mirror above the back bar.

"I usta work clost to Round Rock," he told the man next to him.

He downed his drink at one gulp and reached for the bar bottle as it came down along the line. He became more quiet, more thoughtful, as the night wore on. That haunted restlessness drove him out to the deserted street. He drifted, alone and wrapped in brooding thought, into Cavanaugh's.

The negro piano player knew the song of Sam Bass. He sang it through three times for Buck. Buck gave him ten dollars. Only ten more remained in his overalls pocket.

AFTER many more drinks Buck Bell started for a place across the tracks. His last ten was spent. His heart was as empty as his pockets. The mournful shriek of a locomotive made him shiver as he halted in the lee of the station to light a cigaret. The train dispatcher stepped out of the lighted telegraph office, an eyeshade across his forehead, train orders in his hand. He did not see the tall form of Buck Bell leaning a little unsteadily in the darkness just to one side of the locomotive headlight.

No. 3 squealed to a halt to deposit two sleepy traveling drummers. The door of the express car opened. The armed messenger dropped a heavy iron box on the waiting truck alongside the car. The train dispatcher was now signing for the box. The drummers hurried for the Malta House.

"Payroll for the mines," the express messenger explained. "Wish I had that much. I'd quit riding these damn' night runs. Blizzard comin'."

The door of the express car slid shut. A yellow lantern circled in the night. The train pulled out slowly and the dispatcher wheeled away the truck with its steel box.

The wheels of the truck creaked its dismal passage. The form of Buck Bell moved in a blackness made more opaque by the departure of the train lights. The man was pushing the truck within arm's reach of the tall cowboy.

Buck lifted his gun from its old scabbard. He balanced its weight in his hand, moved out of his tracks. Swung the long barrel in a swift arc. The man wheeling the truck slumped down gently, an indistinct lump on the deserted platform.

Buck Bell moved swiftly now. He picked the steel box up in his arms and ran down the tracks. He did not halt until he reached the stockyards, a mile or more from town. He hid the box under the loading chute, then started back.

The walk in the cold air had driven the whisky fog from his brain. Buck was sober now. The sadness, the brooding restlessness, had gone and in its place came swift regrets. He fought down those regrets as best he could. He'd been a fool to do it, but he was into it now. He'd hang and rattle. Play 'er out as the cards fell and ask no man for better than even odds. He wondered how hard he'd hit that depot feller. Can't let a man lay out in the cold that way. Besides, there was the trains to attend to.

But, as he circled the depot, he saw the sheriff and the train dispatcher talking earnestly inside the lighted telegraph and ticket office. Buck moved away, across to Dick Powell's place. Nobody took notice of his entrance as he slipped in the back door and dropped into a chair by the stove. Then somebody called the house up for a drink and Buck joined the crowd. He had not been missed.

"How's things stackin' up, Buck?" It

was old Horace who voiced the question. "Need a little money? I was talkin' to the Old Gent and he said to let you have what you need. You kin come back and work it out in the spring. It ain't every man I'd do that fer. But like I was tellin' the Old Gent, you're on the square and kin be depended on."

Buck's mouth opened, then closed without saying a word. He had been on the verge of telling the wagon boss the whole thing. Until now, Buck Bell had accepted the trust of his fellowmen as a matter of course. Now, well, now it was all over. He was beginning to pay already for his crime.

"I'll just make 'er out fer a hundred dollars, Buck."

Horace was misinterpreting the cowboy's silence. Buck shook his head.

"I'd ruther not, Horace. I'll make 'er somehow. It's right white of you and the Old Gent. I won't fergit it."

THE SHERIFF came in, an icy gust of wind and snow following him inside the lamplit, smoke hazed saloon. Dick Powell was a blunt statured man, husky, reddish of hair, with keen gray eyes and a drooping mustache. A good natured sort of fellow who was rated as a crackerjack cow hand. The grin on Dick's mouth held a grim twist as his eyes swept the crowd with slow deliberation.

"Belly up to the mahogany, Dick," invited some one.

Dick Powell did not seem to hear. A hush fell over the gathering. The fiddle in the hands of a Cree breed squeaked thinly and went silent. The bartender, from force of habit, reached for the sawed off shotgun under the bar.

"Boys," said the blocky sheriff, his voice heavy with sadness, rather than anger, "there's a damn' skunk amongst us tonight. When you boys rode in, I give you the run of the town. A man hates to think he has to watch boys that he's worked with in the wet and cold and hot weather. I never thought a Circle C man would coyote on me."

"What the hell you drivin' at, Dick?" asked Horace, his mild eyes glinting a little.

"Some polecat knocked the depot man on the head and got off with five thousand dollars, that's all."

"Where did that key pounder ever git five thousand bucks?" asked some one.

"Payroll fer the Landusky mine. Five thousand in cash."

"Well," drawled Cotton Eye, the nighthawk, "I reckon them mine folks will keep on runnin' things just the same. Have a drink and fergit it."

"Whoever lifted that roll won't have to worry none about forkin' hay and openin' water holes this winter," chuckled another cowboy.

"Dad burn the luck," complained a third, "why didn't I think about glaumin' that payroll? Now I gotta break out of a early mornin' from now till spring, shovelin' hay into a lot o' bawlin' dogies. Some gents gits all the luck."

But for all their banter, they felt uneasy. Who among them had stolen that five thousand dollars? Oddly enough, no man blamed the thief. They rather admired his ingenuity. He had made a lucky haul.

"Well, Dick," said Horace slowly, "whoever done it, must 'a' been blind drunk. You know every man in the outfit. There ain't one rotten egg in the bunch. Say, how do you know it wa'n't some tramp er some stray miner that done it?"

"The depot man heard his spurs jingle, so he says," growled the sheriff, "just before he got beefed. It was some cow hand. And outside of you boys there ain't a cowboy in town. He heard them spurs."

"Got ary idee who might 'a' done it?" asked Horace.

"If I have, I'll keep it to myself," came the tart reply. "I look to you boys to lend me a hand and all I git is some horrawin'."

"No need to git hot about it," grinned the wagon boss, toying with his drink.

The sheriff ignored that remark and turned to his bartender.

"Was all of these men in the place at midnight when No. 3 come in?"

The bartender smoothed his bald head in grave thought. He had taken a goodly amount of drinks since the boys got in. Owl eyed, he tallied the crowd.

"Near as I kin recollect, Dick, not a man o' them has left since I come back from supper at eleven."

"Then that alibis this bunch of cow dodgers," and the sheriff moved on out and down the street.

THE ROBBERY gave the cowpunchers a meaty topic for talk—talk and more drinks. They hit upon the idea of following Dick Powell in his sleuthing.

From one saloon to the next they waddled in the wake of the annoyed sheriff. The crowd had taken on numbers until by the time they reached the Bloody Heart the entire outfit was crowded into the saloon.

Various bartenders had furnished ironclad alibis for every Circle C man. Powell gave up in disgust and slipped away from the throng, which was growing somewhat boisterous. Horace followed the sheriff out the back door. Twenty-five cowpunchers set about to make the most of the momentous occasion.

Months of hard work in the saddle and branding corrals without a holiday, long days from the crack of dawn until dark, with two hours night guard for good measure, had starved them for a little fun. These men belonged to a breed that has no equal. For forty dollars a month and grub they ride mean horses, face death and hunger and thirst and cold and bitter discomforts. They ask no favors, whine out no complaint, taking the good along with the bad. It is all in a day's work. Most of them were cowmen at twelve years of age. At sixty there would be much of the boy left in their big hearts. It is not for those who have not known their breed to censure their faults. They lived according to their lights.

John Law and his rules meant little in their lives. They had a way of settling personal affairs, those men who roamed the West in the Eighties when the country needed them.

So they held kangaroo court. The bartender at the Bloody Heart was found guilty and fined several rounds of drinks. Then they moved on to the next saloon and again held court. Another dispenser of redeye was found guilty. Guilty as hell, by ballot. The fine was duly paid in liquid form. And at daybreak they had routed the sheriff from his warm bed, stood him up on the bar, clad in a knee length nightshirt, boots, hat and a cold cigaret. Ballots were passed, signed and dropped in Dick's hat. He read them, one by one.

"Guilty as hell."

"Gash damn' you bonehead, misfit, loco idiots!"

But he paid the fine, setting out the glasses and bottle with his own hand.

It was a large night. Guns popped jubilant greeting to a day that held no hard ride after stray cattle.

Most of them were flat broke. Cotton Eye, the bloated financier, had lost his money and hocked his spurs for a bottle to take along. Then he engaged the bartender in conversation while a confederate stole back the spurs.

Horace gathered his men one, by one, mounted them, and started them out of town. They bucked their horses down the street, emptying their guns at a leaden sky. Behind them was their night's pleasure. Ahead lay the dread winter.

BUCK BELL got his private horse from the barn. Because he owned no overcoat, he donned his slicker and wrapped his feet in strips of gunnysack. Alone, his hat pulled down across his eyes, his ungloved hands shoved down against the saddle cantle, he rode out of town.

As he neared the stockyards he glanced about. No living thing moved in the snow swept world that met his eye. He swung off his horse and dragged the steel box from under the loading chute. A heavy padlock fastened it. Buck drew

his .45 and shot off the lock. His stiff fingers pried up the lid. There lay the banknotes in piles bound with wide rubber bands. He shoved the money into the deep pockets of his angora chaps. Then he buried the empty metal box in the débris under the chute.

Five minutes later he rode on again into the storm. He looked old and sadly troubled. The bitter cold was pinching the color from his face. He was a little sick from the liquor that he had drunk. Sick and lonesome.

Through the lane and past the graveyard, on to the wind swept benchland, headed south toward the badlands of the Missouri River, almost a hundred miles away. With the wind at his back, Buck Bell drifted. His heart was as heavy as the leaden sky. Ahead of him rolled a giant tumbleweed. On and on, across the bench, grotesque, almost alive, blown along by the north wind. Headed south.

In the pockets of his black chaps was stowed more money than he had ever seen or even dreamed of. There was not a chance of the theft being fastened to him. It had been easy, almost too easy to seem true. With five thousand dollars a man could buy a good bunch of cattle down in New Mexico or Arizona. Buck was cowman enough to make a herd pay. It would mean that he no longer need work for wages. For forty a month . . . Forty into five thousand. Buck was a good hand at figures. One hundred and twenty-five months. Ten years and more, even if a man didn't spend a dime for poker or redeye or smokin'—or clothes. Socks and such. He had sold his bed for twenty dollars. That twenty was in his vest pocket now. He had kept it separated from the other money—the money he had stolen.

"Sam Bass was born in Indiana; it was his native home . . ."

The song, high pitched, quavering, drifted along the wind from behind Buck, blurred a little in the flurry of hard snow that swirled across the ground like white sand. Buck halted as the singer came up out of the storm. It was Dick Powell, the sheriff.

SOMETHING hot scalded Buck Bell's heart as the rider came alongside. Had the sheriff somehow found him out? Buck almost hoped so. But Powell grinned as easy greeting. He was warmly clad in chaps, overshoes and a buffalo coat. The stock of a carbine jutted from his saddle scabbard.

"You look fer all the world like a bull that's been whipped outa the herd, Bell. Here, see what this'll do to you."

He passed over a quart of whisky. They drank together and rode on with the storm.

"Trailin' that gent that done the robbery, Dick?"

The sheriff grunted into his fur collar.

"Trailin' hell! Whoever done it didn't leave a sign. But mark my words, Bell, he'll give hisself away."

"How?"

Buck Bell slapped his cold hands against the slicker to beat the blood into circulation.

"Here, take these." The sheriff pulled a pair of yarn mitts from his pocket. "I brung along an extra pair. The missus knit 'em."

Buck pulled on the red mittens, mumbling his gratitude.

"How?" The sheriff replied to his question. "Well, it's thisaway, Bell. I know every man that was in town that night. I know where each man will be workin' this winter. Horace gimme their names and what camps they'd be at. I wired fer the serial number of them stolen banknotes. When that money begins goin' into circulation, I'll nab my man. Er if ary man quits this range, I'll be follerin' him. I'll have the other towns posted. He's corralled."

The sheriff consulted a little book.

"Here's the list. Stuart and Contway at Big Warm. Howe and Smith at Little Warm. You and Cotton Eye at Rocky Point, down on the Missouri. And so on."

He shoved the book back into his pocket. Buck's head was lowered as he

fumbled with clumsy hands at a witch's knot in his horse's mane. His brain was working swiftly. Why had Horace lied? Why had the wagon boss told the sheriff that he, Buck Bell, was going into a line camp at Rocky Point?

"I wouldn't be tellin' this to everybody, understand," continued the sheriff. "I know I kin trust you, Bell."

If the sheriff had taken a sharp knife and struck the cowpuncher in the back he could not have hurt Buck Bell more than he did when he spoke those words.

They rode on in silence. Buck was chilled to the bone by the wind; it bit through his inadequate clothing. Dick urged the bottle on him to warm his blood.

"I got some stuff that'll be driftin' with the storms this winter, Bell. I spoke to the Old Gent about it. He said it'd be all right if you boys kinda kept an eye on 'em and feed a few if need be."

"Shore," mumbled Buck. "Shore thing."

Their trails parted a little farther on. The sheriff made Buck take his overshoes and the bottle.

"I'll be back home in a couple o' hours. Don't be a damn' fool, Bell. So long. Good luck, old-timer. See you next spring when the chinook melts you outa the bad lands."

When they had parted Buck rode on, the ache in his heart more bitter than before. The words of the sheriff's song came drifting back out of the storm—the song of Sam Bass.

> " . . . Sam he is a corpse and six foot under clay."

Buck stayed that night at a line camp, and pushed on the next morning. He kept wondering why Horace had lied. It hung like a sand burr in his thoughts all that day. He stopped late the next afternoon at a horse camp; and because they were short handed, Buck worked there a week. Then he drifted on once more, refusing a cent for his labors. It was the ethics of the grub line that forbade his accepting payment. They had given him and his horse food and shelter. He asked no more, though the work had been hard and he had eaten but two meals each day. Breakfast before they rode away; supper when they came in after dark. He had made the biscuits, helped with the dishes, and split wood, to boot. And he had given them what was left of the whisky.

BECAUSE Rocky Point lay along his route to somewhere south, he rode up there one evening at dusk.

A saddled horse was humped in the lee of the shed. Hollow eyed cattle bawled in the corral. No smoke came from the little log cabin. Filled with grave misgivings, Buck Bell stepped into the cabin. The moan of a man in pain came out of its dark interior. He found Cotton Eye lying fully clothed in bed, his leg broken between the ankle and knee. He had been like that since the day before, he told Buck through set teeth.

"Horse fell on me, comin' up the river."

Buck built the fire and made the crippled man as comfortable as possible. Then he took care of the horses and scattered hay for the gaunt cattle. When he came back to the cabin, he hid his fears under a careless banter.

"I'll throw some soup into you, Cotton Eye. And coffee. Now roll over on your back and cuss me while I git this boot cut off. I'll be as gentle as a cow with her first calf, pardner."

Those men of the frontier were steady of hand and ingenious of brain. Broken bones and gunshot wounds were not uncommon. A man needed to know the rudiments of crude surgery in those days when doctors were few and far between.

There was no sleep for either man that night. Buck fashioned a sling to hold the suffering man while he pulled the fractured bone into place. The erstwhile nighthawk groaned. Buck swore softly as he labored. He splinted the leg with stout willow sticks and strips of tanned rawhide saddle strings. Beads of sweat covered the drawn face of Cotton Eye. He lay back, whimpering a little through clenched teeth, sick and faint, but game enough. Buck held a cup of black coffee to his mouth.

"She's all over but the knittin', pard. Here's a cigaroot. She'll hurt like hell fer a spell, but it's a clean break and orter heal fast. I'll run the show till you git well."

"I'd 'a' died if you hadn't come along, Buck."

"Mebbe."

Buck built up the fire. His chaps with their precious store of money hung on a wooden peg with his bridle. Now and then he glanced that way, his lips smiling without humor.

"You saved my life, Buck. I ain't fergittin'."

"You better try to sleep, feller," grunted Buck.

Cotton Eye lay there, a little flushed with fever, his eyes brighter than they should have been.

"I wonder, Buck, if you'd be doin' this fer me if you knowed."

"Knowed what, Cotton Eye?"

"That money I won off you. That deck was marked."

"Shore thing," nodded Buck Bell, "I knowed that. But a man's gotta have some kinda excitement around a cow camp, even if it's playin' poker with a marked deck. I was ketchin' on to the markin's about the time I went broke."

Cotton Eye was delirious by morning. Buck was forced to tie the man down while he fed and watered the cattle. Because there was only one bed, Buck had made out with the saddle blankets and the sick man's overcoat.

DURING the days that followed Buck Bell did the work of five men. He chopped wood, cooked, and nursed Cotton Eye, whose fever went down slowly. He rode out each day, gathering poor cows that were too weak to rustle. He hooked up the work team and hauled hay, scattering it in a wide circle outside the corral. He opened the water hole twice a day. He puttered about the cabin, fixing it for the long winter, and forced a cheerfulness into the chatter that he flung at Cotton Eye. When he finally crawled into his improvised bed, fully clothed save for hat and boots, he was too weary to mind the cold much.

He killed a beef one evening. That night he brought in a square piece of the hide and worked on it with his pocket knife.

"Let's have that good leg o' your'n, pardner." Buck wrapped the hide about the leg, nodded, marked it with his knife and took the hide back to his seat by the fire.

"Them splints kin come off in a day er so. I'm fixin' a sorter casin' to fit around that game laig. This hide'll be plenty hard and we'll lace it, savvy? Padded with the felt from a man's hat, she'll make a cast that'll be useful and right ornamental, with the hair on the outside. I'm stretchin' it around this willer pole to make 'er smooth."

Buck tanned the rest of the hide and made himself moccasins and a coat that was ill fitting but warm enough. He killed a blacktail buck and they feasted on venison. Buck spent his evenings tanning the hide. The rawhide cast, smooth and hard and padded with felt from Buck's hat, now replaced the willow splints. Buck wore a cap made out of a piece of Hudson's Bay blanket. He refused the offer of Cotton Eye's clothes.

With December came real winter—the hardest winter the cowmen in Montana have ever known. The hay was giving out. Buck worked on a snowplow. The cattle in the field grew in number each day. Gaunt flanked, hollow eyed, bawling as they trained at a stubborn walk with the storm.

Gray days. White days. Bitter days. The cattle drifting down into the badlands. Even the big native steers were finding it hard to paw to feed under the crusted snow.

Buck's black chaps no longer banked his stolen money. He had buried the stuff in a corner of the cow shed, wrapped carefully in his slicker. His daylight labors brought peace of mind. But sometimes he lay awake, far into the night, haunted by thoughts of the buried wealth. The dream of a cow outfit of his own was replaced by the black nightmare of his

theft. He was tempted a hundred times to share the burden of his guilt with Cotton Eye who was now hobbling about on crutches made of forked sticks wrapped and padded with deerskin.

"Wish I could git word out to the ranch," said Buck, "This hay ain't gonna last. The only shot, if this keeps up, is to drift south o' the river where the shelter is better. Mebbe train out from there. They could buy hay at Lewistown and Gilt Edge. I had to kill three more calves today. Cows didn't have milk to feed the li'l beggars. Hear the cows a-bawlin'? Hell, ain't it?"

The haystacks were becoming fewer. Buck and his crippled partner found it hard to fill the long silences that fell over them. Cotton Eye hobbled about now, getting the meals and washing dishes. He scraped the thick frost from the window and would sit there, smoking and watching Buck Bell pitch hay sparingly to the starving cattle. When Buck saddled his horse and rode back into the breaks to bring in more stumbling, gaunt steers and cows, Cotton Eye would curse with futile fury at his aching leg.

"Brung in three more o' Dick Powell's steers today. Weak as hell. Three-four Circle Diamond cows, another Square steer, one er two Bear Paw Pool strays, and the Widder Brown's Jersey milk cow. The widder sets a heap o' store by that cow. It must be shore a-stormin' up on the ridges, to drift that stuff into the breaks. If this keeps up, there won't be a cow left in the country."

"You was sayin' something about gettin' word to the ranch, Buck. I kin make out to ride now. I'd like to tackle it. Ain't doin' no good here."

"If you're plumb sure you kin make it, pardner?"

"Shore thing, I kin. I'll pull out in the mornin'."

BUCK wrapped the injured leg in a blanket and Cotton Eye rode away in the gray dawn. Buck grinned a farewell. When Cotton Eye was gone, Buck tried to whistle away the gnawing loneliness. He worked feverishly, not even taking a few minutes off at noon for his usual coffee and beans and meat. Now and then, when his chores took him past the corner of the shed where the stolen money had been buried, he would quicken his pace, as a man afraid of ghosts might pass with haste by a grave.

"Why did Horace lie?" he asked himself a thousand and one times.

"Because Horace knowed who done the robbery!" came the still answer out of each night's darkness.

Cotton Eye had left his bed and his warsack filled with a few clothes and knicknacks. Delving into the sack for a needle and thread one day, a week or so after Cotton Eye's departure, Buck came upon a large envelope of heavy paper. He emptied its contents of saddle wax and thread and harness needles and awl. He sat there, smiling softly, the worried frown momentarily gone from his forehead.

"I'll do it. I'll use this envelope to hold the money. Else I'll be plumb crazy before spring. I'll send the money to Horace, first man that passes along."

He spent an evening composing a laborious letter to the Circle C wagon boss. That night he slept without tossing and dreaming. And with the first streak of dawn he was out in the shed with pick and shovel, digging in the corner. With hands that shook with eagerness, he undid the slicker. A choking cry broke from his pulsing throat. The money was gone. All of it. The slicker held nothing but some scraps of old newspaper, rudely cut and bundled in imitation of the bank-notes.

For a long time Buck squatted there on the ground, staring with dazed eyes at the slicker and its mocking contents. A racking, horrible laugh rattled from his dry lips. Then he went on back to the cabin, his brain aching dully with milling thoughts.

Cotton Eye had taken the money. Cotton Eye was a thief as well as a crooked card sharp. It was hard to take—after what he'd done fer Cotton Eye.

"Well, the damn' stuff is gone. Gone

fer keeps. Too late now to send it back with that confession . . . Cotton Eye would be headed south by now . . . south . . . with five thousand dollars."

Then a slow grin spread across the mouth of Buck Bell. He chuckled, then laughed until the coffee boiled over and on to the stove.

"That's shore one on me. Frettin' and stewin' around about that money. Him playin' possum with that leg. Diggin' 'er up, when I rode off yesterday. But how'd he know I had it? How'd he know where it was buried? Well, I got all winter to figger 'er out."

DAYS slipped into weeks. Weeks of white isolation. The hay was about gone. No word from the ranch. And that eternal gray sky overhead like a shroud.

Came that morning when Buck Bell looked out at the empty hay corral. This was the end of the trail. All about the cabin the gaunt eyed cattle walked aimlessly, bawling. Buck went back into the cabin and began packing. When his grub was sacked and his bed rolled he went out to the barn and hooked the team to his crude snow plow. He tied his saddle horse to the off horse and loaded his bed and grub on the snow plow. Then he scrawled a note and laid it on the rawhide covered table, weighting it with a can of frozen tomatoes.

Closing the door of the log cabin, he picked up the lines and seated himself on the snow plow. As the team got under way, he grinned back over his shoulder.

"So long, cabin. Here goes nothin'."

Behind him, bawling hungrily, trailed the cattle. Their dumb faith was pinned to the man and his horses.

South into the breaks across the frozen river. The sun was a dim white ball in a dead sky. The air was still and sharp. The snow plow creaked and groaned.

"Come on, dogies!"

A gaunt scarecrow of a man, riding his crazy plow. A beard covered his face up to the frost blackened cheekbones. His clothes were a patchwork of blanket, cowhide, and buckskin with the hair on. His hair came to his shoulders. Under the deerhide covering, his hands and feet were swollen and stiff from frostbite.

"Sam Bass was born in Indiana; it was his native home,
And at the age of seventeen, young Sam begun to roam."

The song blended crazily with the bawl of starving cattle, the creak of his covered plow runners and the click of hoofs.

South into the sheltering badlands where the snow was deep but soft. The plow cut through, clearing a ten foot path through the drifts. The cattle packed the trail, crowding and riding one another to get to the precious feed.

"Grass belly deep!" cried Buck, looking back. "Come on, you hungry dogies! Git the wrinkles outa your paunches. Mebbe so it's come Christmas fer you."

He unhooked the team at last and watered them at a hole cut in the ice. He camped at the edge of the cleared bottomland and his pitch fire sent its crimson shaft into the night. He had found feed for his cattle. There was more to be had for the plowing. He slept that night with a smile of tired happiness on his bearded, frost cracked lips.

In those days to come, Buck Bell found a measure of happiness and peace. He labored untiringly, a man of rawhide. A bearded, frost blackened scarecrow. And the haunting ache of that stolen money slipped into a forgetfulness, buried by the work he was doing.

He cleared huge patches of grass. He rode back across the river and trailed in more starving cattle to share his grass. Sometimes he came within a mile of the cabin at Rocky Point but always he was too busy to stop. Those short days were too brief to waste even a few minutes in idle pastime. The snow was too deep to tire his horse in breaking useless trail to the cabin to see whether any one had been there.

So he did not know that Horace had come and found that note on the table.

Hay's played out. I'm pullin' out. If I don't die off before the chinook comes, I'll come in and give myself up. I taken that money that night in town. Then I lost it. So the law kin take it outa my hide.—BUCK BELL.

A frozen, wolf gnawed steer carcass lay near the cabin. Its ripped paunch held no grass. Only willow sticks, some of them almost the thickness of a man's wrist.

THIS was the winter of '86-'87, when the drift fences and cut coulees held the hide and bones of a hundred thousand steers. When the mercury hung below forty-five, and more than a few cowboys died for their outfits. When cowmen stared out across the blizzard swept hills, dry eyed, with aching lumps in their throats. Grim, silent, defeated.

The sun was a white ball inside its circle of gray, cold as the eye of a corpse. Sun dogs followed its passing, across a sky that knew no warmth. At night the patches of stars seemed frozen in a black agate sky.

And when the last of the hay was gone, the men sat about the bunkhouse stove. And the strings of staggering, bawling cattle drifted on down the wind to death.

At night the wolves and coyotes flung the death song toward the glittering stars.

That was the winter of '86-'87. The winter that broke the back of the cow country.

South of the river, Buck Bell watched the last of the feed go. He had lost track of the days. He did not know what month it was. But he knew that the grass had played out and that the end of the trail lay just ahead. His grub was gone and he was living on meat and beans. Each day he felt of his teeth to test the coming symptoms of scurvy. His clothes were a mass of patches. His eyes were swollen almost shut, the lids scaled from frost, the eyeballs discolored by snow blindness. Only half a dozen matches remained in his pocket. He could not remember the taste of tobacco and coffee.

Half frozen, he lay in a knot under tarp and blankets, that night in early spring when a wind roared down out of the canons with a droning, rushing sound.

The scrub pines whispered; cattle got to their feet. Buck stirred a little under the tarp, hardly awake. Then the wind cut down the river and swept his forlorn camp. No man who has ever heard the voice of the chinook wind can ever forget its whimper. Buck threw back the tarp and the warm blast rushed down upon him.

A harsh, choking cry broke from his throat as he sat up in bed. His arms, ragged, aching, frost seared, flung out in a wide gesture. His face, bearded and scarred black, lifted. His eyes found the stars that seemed close overhead in a warm sky. Terrible sobs shook him. Tears streamed down from his aching eyes.

"God, oh, God!"

Over and over again.

"God!"

He could find no other word to fit into the prayer that sobbed and rattled and laughed in his throat.

The weary horses felt the blessing of that chinook wind. The cattle milled and bawled a restless chant. The melting snow in the tree branches dripped with increasing cadence. A golden moon rode across the sky toward the jagged skyline. The hard winter was over. The chinook had come. Its passage through the pines sang the requiem of cattle and horses and men that slept beneath the crusted drifts.

And when the coulees became rivers and the ridges lay bare, Buck Bell trailed his straggling herd up the ridge and on to the open prairie.

"Git along, little dogies, git along!"

He sang in a cracked voice as his horse patiently followed the drags.

AND SO they found him that day in the Spring of '87. Horace and the little man with the white beard and puckered, sky blue eyes who owned the Circle C. Horace and the Old Gent.

They did not know him. Their eyes were dim with the miracle that lay before

them. Cattle. Hundreds of cattle, grazing hungrily. And behind them a snow blind man who was all hair and rags, who sang in a crazy voice, the words of "Sam Bass."

A phantom herd followed by a ghost. It was impossible to believe that so many cattle could have lived, while so many thousands of others had died. Buck's herd filled the coulees and covered the ridges. The chain harness rattled on the work team that was hooked to a bull hide which held Buck's bed and two young calves hog tied.

A dozen brands were represented in that gaunt herd. One of those calves belonged to the Widow Brown's Jersey milk cow. Its father was the prize Circle Diamond bull that had strayed down from its Canadian range. Half of Dick Powell's herd was there.

"Sam Bass was born in Indiana . . ."

Between them, the Old Gent and Horace got Buck Bell to the ranch. Somebody went for Doc Steele, fifty miles away. For Buck was blind and one foot so badly frozen that three toes had to come off.

"He'll see again in ten days," said the doctor. "Let him sleep. Give him warm food. Go slow on the whisky. He has a barb wire constitution and a rawhide carcass." He was a little puzzled at Buck's delirious babbling.

"He's been worrying about something."

Horace and the Old Gent exchanged glances. The owner of the Circle C thoughtfully stroked his whiskers and smiled down at the sleeping Buck Bell. Then he handed the doctor the note that Horace had found on the table at the deserted line camp at Rocky Point. Doc Steele knew cowboys. He understood. He handed back the note and blew his nose like a trumpet. The Old Gent fetched glasses and the bottle.

"Cotton Eye got here about New Year's, Doc. He had five thousand dollars and said he'd stole it. Wanted to plead guilty and take his medicine. His story didn't hold water. He'd been sitting in a poker game when the money was stolen at the depot. Horace knew Buck was the thief because the melting snow on Buck's hat and clothes showed he'd been out in the storm about the time that depot man was robbed. Cotton Eye finally admitted he'd stolen the money from Buck. Buck had kept him awake nights, talking about the robbery in his sleep like a man gone loco. Buck saved Cotton Eye's life and he wanted to return the favor."

Doc Steele chuckled deep down in his muscular throat.

"Couple of sentimental old sage hens. It's a damn' shame, sir, that we haven't more of such outlaws in this world."

He lifted his glass.

"Here's to 'em."

"May their breed never die out."

When they had set down their glasses, Doc Steele looked quizzically at the cowman.

"How is this thing going to be squared with the mining people?"

The sky blue eyes of the old cattleman twinkled. Doc Steele was somehow reminded of the sun shining through summer rain.

"I bought the damn' mine, Doc. Last fall. I don't think that anything more need be said about that fool holdup. Buck Bell saved what cattle I have left. God and Buck Bell alone know how he managed. You should have seen what I saw. The whole range spotted with dead critters. Like a boneyard a hundred miles square. We'd rode all day across a cow country graveyard. When I heard cattle bawling, I thought I was dreaming. That herd trailing up out of the breaks. A man too weak to walk, riding behind 'em, singing— It was something, Doc, that a man won't ever forget."

They filled their glasses and drank in silence. Then they tiptoed out and Buck Bell slept on, a smile of peace on his frost cracked lips.

Outside, the chinook wind whispered its promise to the cow country.

ONE SUNNY day in early June, a cowboy, dressed in his town clothes and freshly shaved, drove a Jersey cow and her calf to the Widow Brown's place on the head of Rock Creek. As he poked along, lazing in his saddle, he sang a song that had to do with the life and death of one Sam Bass.

Tall grass hid the bleached bones in the coulees. A meadowlark sat on a cottonwood limb and filled the warm air with liquid warbling. Buck Bell, now wagon boss of the Circle C roundup, rode a-courting.

"In the spring," said a poet, "a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

And while Buck Bell was no mere youth, and this was the spring of '87, this cowboy rode his love trail.

"Lawzee, if it ain't Sukie!" Tears of joy filled the soft eyes of the ample lady in the cabin doorway. "With a big heifer calf a-follerin'! And of all people! Buck Bell! 'Light, Buck, and look at your saddle!"

About third guard time, Buck rode slowly back to the roundup camp down the creek. His head was tilted toward the stars and he sang with joyful abandon—

"Sam Bass was born in Indiana . . ."

GHOST ISLAND

By Donald A. Cadzow

ON THE north shore of St. Lawrence Island, in Bering Sea, are two Eskimo villages called Kok-u-lik and Sa-von-ga. The doors of the stone houses in the villages stand open to the chill north wind from the Arctic. Underneath the sagging timbers, which once held up the roofs, grinning skeletons look out at the intruders.

These villages are tabu to the Eskimo now living on the island, and are supposed to be inhabited by ghosts and evil spirits. According to local tradition, a terrible sickness came upon the people, wiping out the entire population because they violated certain unwritten laws of their people.

So much for local tradition, which, as a general rule, seldom approaches the truth. These two villages of the dead stand as a monument to a whaling captain who traded for furs on the side.

In the summer of 1878 a ship put into St. Lawrence Island to buy furs from the natives. Having little else in his hold for this purpose but whisky, the captain proceeded to get the natives drunk. The taste of rum was new to them. And when the vessel sailed back to the States the cargo of whisky had been exchanged for precious skins—the captain chuckling because of his canny trade.

For days the natives must have remained drunk, which caused them to neglect their hunting. The caribou and bear roamed unmolested near the camps and as the winter drew in they too moved away to better feeding grounds. How it all ended no one knows, for there were no survivors to tell the story. And at least four hundred people died of starvation in consequence of the introduction of the cargo of whisky.

EMPTY BOTTLES

What use had any six foot man for an empty one quart bottle?

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

A RATHER large, awkward man shambled into the One Way Thru Saloon, sidled over to the bar and addressed Cock Eye Baer, the mixer. His voice was so low that Cock Eye leaned to hear and then asked for repetition of the nearly voiceless words.

"I want a bottle!" the man blurted out.

"Oh, yeh!" The bartender grinned fatly. "The question now is, gent, how big a bottle?"

"A quart!"

"A man's size—and now what liquor'll you have in it?"

The familiar patrons were listening. The visitor was plainly modest, at least before beginning his drinks; but in buying by the bottleful he would obtain more liquor for much less money. And there was a certain aspect which indicated that the visitor was not quite familiar with the lingo or the customs of this business place. He had asked for a bottle—not for a quart of liquor. He was a long time coming to the point, too.

"Why, if you please, I don't want no liquor; I want an empty bottle!"

"An *empty* bottle?"

"Yes, sir!" the awkward fellow said, deprecatorily, "I want it clean—you know—no whisky or anything—"

"As though whisky ever soiled the insides of a bottle!" some one exclaimed sorrowfully.

"Go in back!" The bartender lifted

his flat nose. "Lotsa bottles out there!"

The man went through into the yard. He returned, smelling alternately of two flat quart bottles, one white, the other brown. They smelled of whisky and he rinsed them many times, finally taking the white one with him down the street.

The saloon crowd watched him take his departure.

"What d'ye make of him?" one asked snortily.

"What he needs is a nipple to go on that bottle!" Cock Eye grinned.

The laughter of the listeners was loud, prolonged, and terminated by a serious round of drinks. Cock Eye was always good that way. He talked brightly and smartly. After several had bought, the bartender served a drink on the house. And then a man came in the front door. The boys gathered around him, made sure he had a drink and then all of them told him what Cock Eye had said when a fellow took an empty bottle out the front door, instead of a full one. It was awfully funny, but Cock Eye had to elucidate his wit himself, because none of the explainers had exactly the lingo and tang with which to tell the story.

THE FOLLOWING afternoon along Butte Street Cock Eye, who was off for the day, saw the awkward fellow coming down the side of the square, shambling. The bartender grinned reminiscently so that the stranger angled over and addressed him.

"I don't know'f I thanked ye for that bottle," the man said. "I had to have it for a baby a lady had down't the camp. You see, you fill it full of pretty middlin' warm water an' when the kid has the stomach ache you put the bottle on the stomach, which warms it. Course you wrap it in rags."

"Quite an idea!" Cock Eye approved. "Tha's all right! But why'd you want it clean for that?"

"I didn't know they was going to put warm water in it. I thought it was for feedin' or something."

" 'Tain't your lady had the baby?"

"No, sir, 'taint. There's a sickly feller there, the husband, I expect. An old woman come over to my wagon about a bottle. So I come up an' got it. I'm just lookin' around myself."

Cock Eye went on his way. He rolled in his mind this new opportunity. By the time night had come and he was in his white apron behind the bar, he was ready for the boys to come in, which they did in due course.

"Say," he said, " 'member that feller come in last night to get a bottle—empty? Well, I met'm up the street today. He did want it for a baby. There's a lady had a kid down't the strollers' camp and an old woman sent him for it, so's they could put warm water into it, to warm the baby's stomach when it ached."

"Say, ain't that funny? You did hit it, didn't you, Cock Eye? You jes' knowed it was for a baby— Huh! Water, too. Say, tha's funny, ain't it? Cock Eye spots a feller wants an empty bottle f'r a baby. What'd he want a clean bottle f'r, anyhow?"

"He didn't know't was for a warmer. He thought it was to feed the kid out of. Old woman sent him for it. He come here."

"Tha's funny—come here f'r an empty bottle!" one of the boys laughed. "Le's have a drink!"

AROUND the Square in Boxelder the boys told about Cock Eye, the empty bottle and the stroller down at the campground, where there was a lady had a baby. The stranger again came uptown and shambled to the Emporium, went to the post office and headed down the creek to the camp, his arms carrying packages. He was pointed out, and people laughed. He was the fellow who asked Cock Eye for an empty bottle. That was funny. He wanted it to put on a baby's stomach, too.

"Who are you?" The city marshal, Pete Culder, softened his insult to the stranger by adding, "If it's any of my business?"

"Why, my name's Frank Hesbern," the man answered readily enough. "I'm kind of looking around for a new country to settle in."

"Understand you got a baby with the stomach ache?"

"Me? Oh, my, no! 'Tain't my baby. I never did get to marry. It's a lady's. She's camped on the flat. The man he's sickly. The old lady asked me to get an empty flat bottle to put on the kid's stomach, tha's all."

"I see—" Culder nodded—"that's funny!"

"What?" Hesbern's gray eyes squinted. "The baby was crying, sir. They wanted to put warm water on its stomach, 'count of the ache."

The city marshal laughed and strolled on while Hesbern watched him wonderingly. Thereafter in the days that followed, sometimes one, sometimes five or six inquirers would speak to the stroller, asking him about the empty bottle. After listening to the explanation they would say:

"That's funny!"

Then they would go on their way, leaving the awkward stranger puzzled more and more.

ONE DAY Cock Eye, waddling on his short legs and with his rotund stomach protruding, was again strolling around the square in the afternoon. It chanced that he met Hesbern, who greeted him.

"Say, mister," the stroller asked, "What's there funny about me getting an empty bottle?"

Cock Eye bristled angrily.

"Who you talkin' to?" he demanded.

Hesbern's gray eyes looked wonderingly into the man's face, steady, narrowing and losing their sparkle in an odd, moon colored opacity.

"Ten-twelve fellers told me you said it was funny," Hesbern answered quietly. "I want to know why?"

Cock Eye's face swelled a blotchy white, red and purple.

"What's it to ye?" Cock Eye cried, his voice rising from a growl into a shrill hawklike shriek, which attracted attention far and wide.

"I got that empty bottle for a baby with the stomach ache," Hesbern declared. "An old woman ast me to, so's they could put it on the kid, account of the lady what had it being in bed, an' her man sickly. I don't see nothin' funny in a baby having the stomach ache."

"I don't care a damn if you do or not!" Cock Eye snarled.

"Uh-huh!" Hesbern grunted, going on his way with two store bundles under his arm.

"Hey, you!" Cock Eye called after him. "I wanta know what's aching you 'bout me? Anyhow, you mind yer own business 'bout me!"

Hesbern turned to gaze at the short, thick, angry man.

"Course," Hesbern answered presently, "I mind my own business. I always do, mister. I've been hearin' some talk, tha's all."

"I don't care what ye hear!" Cock Eye growled into a shriek.

"Tha's what I thought!" Hesbern said shortly, and the bartender's lower jaw dropped.

THAT night instead of just a few of the boys coming into the One Way Thru Saloon, the place was crowded. About every one had come out. Cock Eye Baer, with flat face and glowering eyes, served the drinks, very tart in his few words.

"Hear that stroller insulted you, Cock Eye?" a newcomer inquired. "What'd he say?"

"Why, he ast me what's funny about that empty bottle! I told 'im to mind his own business, bellyaching around. I stood right up to him an' tol' 'im I didn't care what he thought! An', by Gawd, he said he didn't care what I thought! I'm gettin' sick of him standing up to me thataway. I don't have ta take anything from him, I don't!"

"Tha's right, Cock Eye!" the listeners

exclaimed. "Don'tcha let 'im bluff you a dad blamed inch, no sir!"

"Don't worry 'bout me!" Cock Eye snorted. "He won't be the first man I've handled."

"Tha's so, Cock Eye!" approved City Marshal Culder who had dropped in for a warm. "That feller's got a bad eye. I could see't when I talked to 'im."

"I'll look, Marshall. Trust me!" Cock Eye allowed himself to grin a bit. "All I want's you to testify to that to the inquest."

"You bet, old boy!" Culder shook his head. "I got an eye on 'im myself! You c'n see he's thinking something, the way he steps off."

SATURDAY night in Boxelder was an occasion boisterous and full of life. Music from crowded dance halls, whoops from exuberant men, the rustling of an active throng filled the community around Court House Square with jubilee. Just after ten o'clock when an unusual throng had come in, due to cattle droving exigencies, with nesters, homesteaders and bad land scatterers all at hand, an agile little fellow with a face pointed like a rat's, dashed into the One Way Thru Saloon and, stooping low, hissed to Cock Eye Baer for attention.

"I say, Cock Eye!" he whispered. "Com'ere!"

"What's it?" Cock Eye leaned to listen.

"I jes' seen that Stroller Hesbern goin' inta the Claybank Delight Saloon. My lan'! He looked hateful!"

"Liquorin' up?"

"Yeh; he bought a big bottle, two quart. I seen it!"

"Much obliged, Skinny," Cock Eye said. "I'll remember that. I don't ferget favors."

Cock Eye ran his hand under the bar, where he had a long barreled .45 revolver, and made sure that there were loads in it. A minute later another man came in, leaning over and whispering to the bartender:

"Look out, Cock Eye! That stroller bought two quarts to the Claybank—"

"Aw right, Sam! I'm ready!"

Then two men came in from the alley, hurrying.

"Say, that feller Hesbern bought two quarts down to the Claybank, er somers. We seen 'im *emptyin'* it out back jes' now!"

"Pretendin' to liquor up, eh?" Cock Eye grimaced. "An' keepin' steady, eh—huh!"

"That's so," an awed whisper ran around, some one saying, "Better get set, Cock Eye!"

The bartender swallowed obviously, his beady little eyes rolling in their fat sockets. He took a couple of slugs himself. He needed a bracer. He was a humorist, not a fighting man. At the same time he wasn't deficient when it came to a showdown. He'd bashed in a man's skull, served as a bouncer innumerable times, and had come clear on the charge of shooting Dingo Washington in self-defense. He wouldn't back down in face of necessity. He hung up his apron, and the proprietor of the One Way Thru quietly took the bartender's place, spelling him.

Grimly, looking neither to right nor left, Cock Eye Baer sallied forth into the darkness of the alleys. No one followed him. Men sauntered casually out into the gloom and stood, listening. Then they heard two shots, almost together, but none could tell by the echoes from blank walls and bad land bluffs just whence came the sounds.

IN A few minutes the One Way Thru Saloon was crowded to overflowing, every one waiting expectantly. Cock Eye Baer did not return in ten minutes, nor in half an hour. In an hour or two men went scouting cautiously around in the alleys. But it was dawn before any one learned anything of importance. Then on the shortcut path down to the strollers' camp ground City Marshal Pete Culder found Cock Eye lying dead with a bullet buried in his thick chest, driven in the direction of his heart. In Cock Eye's hand, held in *rigor mortis* was his heavy

revolver, with one bullet gone from its cylinder.

"Doggone! I knowed that Hesbern's bad!" Culder gasped. "I'll go down to find 'im, 'f I can!"

He hurried to the strollers' campground, where the strangers usually stopped. He saw Hesbern's wagon and his two heavy draft horses staked in the grass on the creek bottom; but Hesbern's saddlehorse, a beauty, was nowhere in sight.

The city marshal went over to the outfit where the strangers had been delayed by a baby and by the sickness of a man.

"Where's Hesbern?" the city marshal demanded of the weak but convalescent man.

"Why, Marshal—" the man shook his head—"I don't know. Las' night my wife's mother broke a bottle we had to put on the baby's stomach to keep it warm, an' Mr. Hesbern went uptown to git another. My wife figured a two quart'n 'd be better, and so he brought one back, a big 'n. He seemed kinda excited, nervous, swearin' to himself. Same time he didn't say anythin', except-in' he kissed the baby. My lan'! He sure favored we'ns! I don't know what we'd done, me sickly, my wife took bad an' that new baby, 'thout him. 'Him never married, too—an' he saddled his horse to ride away down the branch. He ast if we'd get along right, 'fore he went. Course, I c'n git around, now. He left this order to look after his outfit, account of him gettin' important news."

City Marshal Culder returned to Boxelder Court House Square. He told the sheriff, coroner and prosecutor what he knew. They had a jury sit over Cock Eye Baer's remains, and they rather sidestepped the question of who, why and whence the killing. That night in the One Way Thru Saloon the boys gathered sorrowfully along the bar, staring at Cock Eye's apron, spotted, large and limp, hanging right where Cock Eye himself had hung it, just the other night.

"Poor Cock Eye!" City Marshal Culder shook his head. "We're goin' to miss that boy, yes, indeedy!"

"That's so— Don't seem possible, does it!"

Another shook his head.

"My lan', he was funny, too, the way he talked!" another sighed. "I tell you, he was awfully bright, that old boy!"

"Yeh! 'Member that one he got off the night Frank Hesbern come in? Hesbern, he wanted an empty bottle, an' Cock Eye he said afterwards what Hesbern needed was a nipple on to it; yes, sir, that's what he said! My golly, but the way he said it was comical. No sir! Long's I live I'll never forget it!"

"Well, boys! Le's drink to Cock Eye Baer," the proprietor said. "It's on the house. Bright of tongue; everybody's friend; always all there; big hearted and square dealing. He could crack a joke an' handle a situation. A man's man, old Cock Eye! He lived on the level an' he died in his boots. Here's how, old boy! May you rest easy where you lie tonight! It's a deep sleep ye're in. Here's hoping you'll awaken with a smile on yer lips an' a joke on yer tongue!"

"Doggone!" somebody choked. "I can't believe Cock Eye's daid! It don't seem possible!"

SACRIFICED

By Judson Hanna

DURING the great retreat from Mons in the first stage of the Great War, the commander of the Dublin Sabers received orders to attack the enemy at once and check, if possible, the impetuous German onslaught until the guns of the British artillery could be withdrawn.

It was the first instance in the war where cavalry was used for direct attack. Before that, it had been used only for scout duty.

Sir John English, the commander of the Dublin Sabers, called into counsel the troop captains and laid down the law to them. He was a little fat squire from Yorkshire, and knew nothing about the game of war, except to obey orders.

There must be no wavering, he told the troop captains; no retreat. The attack must be rushed through to the finish. He completed his stern instructions by quoting Napoleon—

"The Guard dies but never surrenders."

After a moment he added:

"I will lead the first troop. The others will follow in echelon."

The troop captains, all fresh faced young Irishmen, saluted, and answered:

"We understand, sir. It is an attack to the finish."

Then one fair haired officer, bolder than the rest, protested—

"Pardon me, sir; we can not spare you out in front."

"To hell with regulations!" the colonel exploded. "I don't push my men from the rear. I get up front and pull them."

He understood the tremendous importance of stopping the German advance, if only for an hour.

So the little fat colonel from Yorkshire who knew nothing about war mounted his big black charger, the Dublin Sabers settled into their saddles and the historic charge began.

It was a memorable charge. Three hundred yards from the enemy line the fat little colonel toppled from his horse. The regiment swept on, slashing and shooting their way through two regiments of Bavarians in spite of the murderous machine gun fire.

Turning, they slashed and shot their way back, pausing to pick up their wounded.

The regiment went up six hundred and sixty strong. It rode back with two hundred and twenty-one men.

But the enemy advance was checked. The R. F. A. saved its guns.

Searching for the fat little colonel, because they would not leave the field without him, they found him beside the fallen black charger; and the one remaining troop captain carried him on his pommel into the lines. There he was laid out with his saber beside him, and the two hundred and twenty-one men of his broken regiment passed through the tent to take their last view of him.

Some of them merely touched his hands. Others stooped to kiss his forehead. A few knelt for a moment and sent up a silent prayer for the repose of his soul.

All of which was somewhat strange, because the troopers were south Ireland men, and the colonel was Church of England—a game little Yorkshire gentleman who knew nothing about war except how to die.

The THRALDOM of SINGAN

A Novelette of the Malay Peninsula

By CHARLES GILSON

PROLOGUE

IT MAY be no particular consolation to a man who is down and out to reflect that he has no one to blame but himself, though it's a sure thing he will blame the world.

Charles Cartwright confined his abuse to that particular part of the globe that lies between Suez and Yokohama, and thereafter accepted the occasion with the philosophy of a young man who takes things as they come. It was not the first time in his life that he had found himself out of a job, with his capital reduced to one dollar Mex, and no immediate prospects.

Seated on the Singapore waterfront, contemplating the lights of the ships at anchor in the roads and the tropic starlight mirrored on the black, oily water of the harbor north of Blakan Mati Island, he reviewed, with neither embitterment, intolerance nor any degree of satisfaction, his thirty-one years of adventurous, misspent life.

During the ten years he had been in the East he had tried his hand at rubber planting, tin mining and brokering, and now he looked as if he were becoming a beachcomber.

To attempt to find excuses for himself would amount to a kind of moral cowardice—and Cartwright was not that sort.

He preferred to look facts in the face. The ordinary poor devil who went under in the tropics was either an inveterate gambler or an unreformed drunkard; and he was neither, just a first class, special fool—one of those people who possess what may be called a genius for irresponsibility, who work and live, drink, laugh and make love, with never a thought for the morrow.

Of a sudden, his introspective meditations were disturbed by something very like a broken sob. For a moment he was startled, for he had believed himself to be alone. The seat upon which he sat on the palm shaded *praya* was backed by a clump of shrubs; and he had not noticed that, on the other side of these shrubs, was another and a similar seat. The one faced the shipping and the sea; the other, the deserted cricket ground, beyond which were the lighted windows of the Singapore hotels, clubs and cafés, from the Hôtel de l'Europe to Raffles'.

Now, there are men—God save the mark—who speak like women, and women with the voices of men; but there was never a man and a woman who wept alike. This was a woman's sob and, though soft, it was pitched on a plaintive, vibrant note, which made Cartwright sit bolt upright and forget for the moment his own worries and troubles.

A woman undoubtedly. And, if so, a

Tamil or Malay. Tamil women wept for nothing, though their oily, unfaithful, talkative husbands usually took good care they had something to cry about. He hated Tamils, as much as he liked Malays; but he knew how to handle their womenfolk. Indeed, life on a jungle estate consisted as much of settling family disputes as tapping rubber or weeding *lalang*.

He would put her right in two shakes, tell her to send her husband to the devil and hit the other lady over the head with the empty gin bottle that had doubtless started the trouble. It would give him something to do. And besides, when you're at the end of your tether, it's encouraging to be told—even by a long-haired, weeping Asiatic, black as sin, and all grease except her earrings—that you are her father and mother, that the light of your countenance eclipses the sun.

He got to his feet, stepped off the paved esplanade on to the stiff "kiss grass" under a traveler's palm and beheld —the woman of his life.

A WHITE woman! Indeed, the face that looked up at him in startled surprise was the whitest face that he had ever seen, for it caught the moonlight and the lights from the street lamps opposite, and it was powdered.

Black eyes and scarlet lips; and a coloured shawl that half concealed a short skirted evening dress that sparkled. A slim little woman, beautiful, graceful, dejected, wearing silly satin shoes for the dewy grass, her black hair shingled—and that white, powdered face.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I thought perhaps I might be of some assistance."

As he felt an unutterable fool, there was nothing either presumptuous or insinuating in the tones of his voice.

She just stared at him. As for Cartwright, he felt he had to explain things, to find out who she was, what she was doing there. It occurred to him that he had seen pictures like her, but never anything real.

"You see," he went on, "I heard you, and I thought you were crying. I expected to find a native woman; and being darned miserable myself, I thought I might be able to put her right. They're rather like children, you know."

With this illuminating statement, he came to a full stop, observing that she had not yet taken her eyes from him.

"You speak French?" she asked, with a slightly foreign accent.

"I'm wise enough not to try," said he. "My vocabulary consists of Tamil, Malay, a choice collection of Chinese swear words and a few Latin tags. For example, *facilis descensus Averno*—highly applicable to myself at the present time."

"If, as you say, you are in trouble," she observed, "you are able to make light of it. That is not so with me."

"I'm sorry," he answered. "But, it's not much good worrying. As often as not, it only makes matters worse."

"What can be worse," she asked, with such spirit as to be almost vehement, "than to be tied to a man you fear and a life you hate, to see the father you love being slowly poisoned in both body and mind, to know that there can never be any release, except through death itself?"

A startling announcement for a powdered lady in an evening dress on the *praya* in Singapore!

"You're in a worse way than I," said he. "I'm only stone broke—out of a job."

She regarded him critically, but with marked approval. She beheld a good looking young Hercules in the crumpled suit of white ducks. The open collar of both shirt and coat displayed a bare, muscular neck; a somewhat battered solar topee perched well on the back of his head. He stood awkwardly in front of her, with legs parted, a fist in one of his trouser pockets grasping his only dollar.

She gave a little shrug of the shoulders and drew her shawl closer around her slim little body.

"I do not know why I should tell you about my private affairs," she said. "I'm afraid you caught me in a weak moment."

"Though I've not the remotest idea

who you are," said he, "you may depend upon it, you can trust me. If I can do anything to help you, I will."

She ignored the suggestion. Opening a handbag that lay upon the seat beside her, she took out a small gold cigaret case and lit a cigaret. Cartwright remained standing, interested, almost fascinated, and yet, for some reason or other, nervous.

"It does one good to talk," she remarked. "Tell me about yourself. You ought not to be out of work. You are a young man; you are very strong; and you are well educated."

"I daresay," said he. "That's why I ought to be ashamed of myself. And I suppose I am."

"You have some business?" she asked.

"A planter. At least, I've done more of that than anything else. I lost my last job because I was under a manager who was a scoundrel; and I was indiscreet enough to tell him so, before I knocked him out. So I can't exactly ask that firm for a letter of recommendation."

She sat thinking a moment, smoking her cigaret, gazing at the passing rickshaws under the street lamps beyond the cricket ground. Her next remark was surprising.

"That would make no difference," she said, as if speaking to herself. "My husband does not want references. He has come to Singapore to find the right man, and I think you may be he."

He stared at her in astonishment.

"You don't mean to tell me you've got a job for an out-of-work planter?" he asked. "I've had ten years of it, off and on. I ought to know something about it. I've worked in Perak, Selangor and Johore. Which state have you come from? I've never seen you before. I'm dead sure of that."

"I do not live in the Malay States at all," she answered. "I come from the island of Singan."

"Never heard of it," said he.

"That is possible," she replied. "Singan is between Borneo and Celebes, in the Macassar Straits."

"Dutch?" he asked.

"It belongs to the Sultan of Singan," she answered. "Listen. I think I can arrange this, provided you understand that it will be no ordinary work. You may be asked to do many things that I do not think you will like doing. Still, that is better than starving. I give you one word of warning. There are no police courts in Singan; there is no mercy there, no justice, no law but jungle law, which means the strongest wins."

Charles Cartwright never thought twice about it. If this little, powdered woman who would have looked more at home in a limousine on the Champs Élysées had returned to civilization from some unheard of, savage island, then he was going there too, if he got the chance.

In his heart, he knew he was a fool; he was asking for trouble. It was a blind bargain, but never in his life had he seen such an appealing look in the eyes of any woman.

"I would give a lot," said he, "to get out of the Malay States."

"Then do as I say," she told him. "You know the Café Riche? My husband will be there for an apértif at eleven tomorrow morning. He is very tall—taller than you—he has a black moustache and wears a large emerald ring. Get into conversation with him, tell him who you are; and he will engage you. Naturally, you will not say that you have talked to me. *Au revoir.*"

With that she was off, across the wet grass in her satin shoes. And from that moment Charles Cartwright went out of the world for fourteen months, and when he turned up at the Nolak Estate on the Yalai River, he looked like a man who had just come out of hell.

CHAPTER I

ON THE YALAI RIVER

THE LITTLE, flat bottomed, tin kettle of a paddle-boat was called *La Chauve-Souris*, and there were only three passengers on board, because there was no accommodation for more,

and because Nolak was just about the last place on earth where any one would want to go.

Of these three, John Eade, wool merchant of New York and Melbourne, was one; and of the other two, the first was a little French lady, and the second, a fat man, short of both sight and breath, who could never have been anything else but a German.

In the offices of an old established firm of New York solicitors it had been suggested that Eade should go himself to Malaya in search of a more or less disreputable younger cousin who, having inherited a moderate fortune for the third time in his life, was nowhere to be found.

From certain rubber estates in both Perak and Johore, a tin dredging company in Singora, from even a *poste-restante* address in Pulo Penang, it was not possible to learn anything of Charles Cartwright's whereabouts. He was believed to have left the Malay Peninsula altogether, since he had been neither seen nor heard of for months.

Eade, who had undertaken to find the young reprobate if he could, was personally interested in the winding up of a maiden aunt's estate, and as he was going to Melbourne in any case, had decided to take in Singapore en route.

There had never been any real harm in Charles. Eade remembered him well as a boy at college. Strong, good looking and a fine athlete, Cartwright had suffered perhaps from overpopularity. He had always been too ready to make both friends and enemies. A rowdy young devil, he had never cared two straws whether he spent his money or used his fists—the very type to prefer a precarious, happy-go-lucky existence, knocking around the world, to anything in the way of a conventional, settled life.

And from all accounts, he had made things hum in the Malay States, before he had had a free fight with his boss on the Sunchor Rubber Estate in Perak. A day or so after that incident, Charles had put in an appearance at Ikey's Bar in Singapore, where he had stood drinks all round. And that was the last that had been heard of him. Suddenly and unaccountably, he had just disappeared, as men sometimes do in the East.

EADE was inclined to believe that his cousin was dead. In any case, he very much doubted whether he would ever get any news of him. And then, the very day he arrived in Singapore, he heard that the missing man was alive. Charles had turned up about a week before, looking pale and haggard, as if he had been having a thin time of it.

No one could say where he had been, or what he had been doing. For once in his life he kept his business to himself; though all his friends remarked that he looked an altered man. Anyway, with his usual luck, he dropped straight on to a new job, for, knowing nothing of his aunt's death, he believed that he hadn't a dollar in the world. Nolak wasn't the sort of place any one would choose; but Cartwright, who was admitted to be one of the best men with natives in the country, had been glad enough to take the first chance that offered.

As for Eade, having come a good two thousand miles out of his way, he thought he might as well see the business through. His cousin had gone up-country to one of the most inaccessible places in all Malaya; but in Raffles' Hotel he ran across a German rubber expert, of the name of Gottheimer, who had got a passage to Nolak on the Yalai, on board a kind of tramp paddle-boat that was owned and skippered by a Portuguese. This Portuguese, a Ferñao Quental, had been pottering about the islands for years, and had long been suspected of having a personal interest in the smuggling carried on by the Chinese and Japanese. He was an ugly little fellow, this Quental, with a parchment colored face and no hair, as proud of the glorified ferryboat he owned as if it were a man-o'-war.

Gottheimer and Eade went aboard at midday; and an hour or so afterward the lady herself turned up. She had evidently

met Quental before, for she took the Portuguese by an arm and marched him straight off to the poop, apparently to be out of earshot of both Eade and the German.

There the two talked for some time, Quental gesticulating excitedly. Then he suddenly ordered his lascar serang to pipe his odds and ends of a crew on deck, scrambled up to the bridge and got the packet under way.

That was something of a surprise to both Eade and the worthy Gottheimer; for Quental had just sworn, by all the saints he didn't believe in, that he couldn't weigh anchor until nearly sundown, to clear the roads before dark.

Eade didn't much mind. So far as he could see, they could do no worse than run aground. He supposed he would get to Nolak somehow, and that there he would find his cousin, Charles. What more immediately interested him was the lady passenger, who hadn't come out of her cabin all day long. From the glimpse he had got of her when she had come tripping up the gangway, John L. Eade had more than liked the looks of her.

Fascinating little bit of goods, and none the less so because he had never expected to come across anything at all like her in the heart of a tropic forest. From the captain he had found out her name, and that she was either married or a widow—found out just enough to make him inquisitive. But apart from her prettiness, there was the attraction of a mystery about her, since for some reason or other the little Portuguese was risking the safety of his ship on her account.

Eade sounded Gottheimer who had been up the river before and who had spent the entire day in a deck chair smoking cheroots, cursing the climate and drinking beer.

There would be dinner at six-thirty, he declared, at which Quental would act as host. The *Chauve-Souris* was a hell-boat, because there was no ice on board. Nolak was a fever trap at the Back of Beyond and, were it not for rubber, would have been forgotten long since by Gott and never by man discovered. The lady passenger at dinner might appear—he could not say. In the East he didn't take any particular interest in white girls; he preferred Japanese, Javanese or Burmese.

Herr Gottheimer, enlivened by pale India ale, expressed his views with more conviction than delicacy. As he had never heard of any one attempting to go up the Yalai by night, he would be surprised if before morning they were not shipwrecked and eaten by crocodiles. And in any case, he repeated, the *Chauve-Souris* was a hell-boat, and the Yalai an earthly Styx.

Eade, who had no use for this sort of thing, strolled toward the little saloon which lay aft, across a shallow well-deck between the engine room and the poop.

IT WAS rapidly growing dark—the swift sunset of the tropics. What could be seen of the sky above the treetops was a blurred streak of reddish brown; and the air, alive with insects, was like a wet blanket, heavy and suffocating.

Eade entered the saloon, where a lamp was burning and a Chinese boy was laying the table for dinner, in which task he was being helped by the lady passenger herself.

She was dressed in a Japanese kimono; and in that light Eade thought she looked even prettier than before. She was talking to the boy in Chinese; and as the tablecloth was not as clean as it might have been, she was insisting upon having another one. When Eade walked into the saloon, she looked up and smiled.

"This is how men keep house!" she observed, with her fascinating French accent, and just the suspicion of a lisp. "Were it not for women, I think you would all become savages again."

Eade liked the way she said that, quite apart from the fact that he thought there might be some truth in it.

"At any rate," he answered, "we can appreciate the niceties of life, if sometimes we don't bother about them. Can I be of any assistance?"

"Everything is finished," she declared. "The boy understands. Dinner will be ready in five minutes. It is already late, and I have not yet dressed."

That knocked the courtier out of John Eade, wool merchant. In a tramp paddle-boat, on an out-of-the-way Malay river, when they might run aground at any moment, she proposed to dress for dinner! He wondered whether he could rake out something in the way of a black tie and dinner clothes. As he had only five minutes to spare, he would have to be quick.

He dived into his cabin, hurled the contents of his box all over the place and was struggling into a stiff collar when the Chinese steward let fly at a gong as if he were scaring devils. A few minutes later Eade turned up in the saloon to find Herr Gottheimer and Madame Scala, dining tête-à-tête, the captain not having ventured to leave the bridge.

Madame might have been in a restaurant on the Rue Royale. She bowed her approval of the American's compliment to herself; and Gottheimer, who was wearing a much creased pongee suit, expressed his disgust by a succession of grunts into his soup plate.

The meal passed pleasantly enough for Eade. Madame, who was as charming as she looked, had plenty to say for herself. From time to time Gottheimer, who sat opposite her, gazed at her in a bovine manner over the top of his spectacles, and then went on with his food.

"So Charles Cartwright is your cousin," she observed, after it had taken her about five minutes to find out all about Eade.

"Why, do you know him?" he exclaimed.

"Of course," she laughed, a little nervously, he thought. "We are—friends. In fact, I go to Nolak especially to see him."

Eade inwardly cursed his cousin, and then did some rapid thinking.

"And what's the hurry?" he asked.

She half turned toward him and looked him straight in the face.

"Is there a hurry?" she asked. "I do not understand."

"I certainly thought there might be something urgent," he stammered. "The little dago captain gave out that he sure couldn't navigate this river in the dark. I though it was you who made him change his mind."

She laughed again at that, though a good deal of her self-assurance seemed to have deserted her.

"That should be my privilege," she said. "But Quental is no fool. He knows his business. You may be sure we shall reach Nolak soon after midnight."

"I'm glad to hear it," said the other. "Herr Gottheimer had doubts about it just now."

He had hoped to draw the German into the conversation; but the worthy Gottheimer wasn't taking any. He looked up, grunted, and then went on cutting a pineapple.

Suddenly Madame Scala touched Eade upon an arm.

"Tell me," she said. "When we get to Nolak, you will sleep on board?"

"Sure," said he. "Time enough to look up my cousin in the morning."

A MOMENT after, complaining of the heat, she suggested that they should go on deck.

And then and there, outside the door of the saloon, she admitted that she had not told him the truth.

"Fernâo Quental just does what I tell him," she observed. "Charles Cartwright's life is worth a great deal more than the little *Chauve-Souris*. But I would not admit that in front of Herr Gottheimer, who did not seem to approve of me."

She led the way up the steps to the poop where there was an iron seat clamped to the deck. Here she sat down, inviting Eade to join her.

"There is plenty of room," she said. "And it is cooler here."

The last of the daylight still lingered in the west—a dull, burning streak above the treetops of the jungle. The flickering light of a hurricane-lamp fell upon a small boat, immediately in front of them, sus-

pended from davits. They could see nothing else. The *Chauve-Souris* was traveling at less than half speed, her engines rattling like a hundred tin cans being dragged over stony ground. She seemed to be gliding through the darkness as a man swims under water.

Madame had given John Eade something to think about. This little, powdered lady, to all intents and purposes, was master of the ship. So his cousin's life was in danger. And she was going to Nolak especially to see Charles. Looked like a love affair. Eade was as curious as ever.

"And what's up with Charles?" he asked. "From all accounts he has been lost for months. Where has he been to, and who wants to do him in?"

"I can not tell you," she answered. "Perhaps you will be told everything when we reach our destination."

"If we ever do," said Eade.

"Of course we shall get there," she laughed. "Little Quental is himself on the bridge, and he can see in the dark like a wild cat. He is used to it."

"And Gottheimer says we haven't a dog's chance," said the American. "There's no moon until late at night. He thinks we'll run aground before that. And if we do, it looks like a bad business for Cousin Charles, eh?"

"I tell you," she said emphatically, "Quental can see in the dark. He has run this ship into worse rivers than this before now, and with no lights. Indeed, at one time that was his business. I tell you that in confidence."

"All the same," insisted Eade, "if my cousin's life's actually in danger, as you say, it will be a serious thing if we do come to grief?"

"There is a boat," she said. "I expect you know how to row, and Herr Gottheimer, too, if he wishes. We can not be many miles from Nolak as it is."

"If I know anything of discipline on board a packet like this," suggested the American, "there's likely to be a panic about nothing. It's ten to one there're no oars in the boat."

He could just see enough of her white face in the lantern light to realize that at last he had struck home. She looked genuinely alarmed, and there was a little catch in her breath.

"That is perhaps possible," she admitted. "Could you manage to see if everything is all right? It would be so terrible if I do not get to Nolak tonight."

"There should be no great difficulty about that," said Eade. "I can catch hold of the gunwale of the boat and climb up the rails. But I shall want the lantern. It's dark as pitch."

He unhooked the lantern which was suspended at the end of a little deck storehouse—the worst place in the world in which to keep provisions in a tropical country. Eade, who was a tall man, had no need to climb to the top of the taffrails to look into the boat. But no sooner had he done so than he sprang backward to the deck; while something that might have been a human panther alighted almost noiselessly by the side of him.

IT TOOK him a moment to recover both his surprise and his balance, for, wearing patent leather shoes, he had nearly slipped and fallen. And then he was aware of the fact that a man was standing in front of him, but a few inches away—a man who had been hiding in the boat.

"Who the hell are you?" he cried, raising the lantern which had fortunately kept alight.

He stepped back at once—a short, quick step—and clenched his fist. The light had disclosed a tall, good looking Chinese, with the pale, lemon colored face of the Cantonese, very black eyes and a high though slightly receding forehead. He was wearing a pair of white duck trousers and a flannel shirt completely open in front, disclosing smooth, shining skin.

The Chinese made no attempt to answer. He glanced rapidly, with the look of a hunted thing, from Eade to Madame Scala, and then for a moment

seemed to consider the advisability of jumping overboard. From the lady there came a shriek, not loud, but half suppressed and tremulous, which, however, suggested the utmost dismay.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she cried. "Liu Tang! *Le diable!* Oh, *que faire?*"

At that the Chinese turned to run for it; and as he did so, John Eade flew at him like a dog, and caught him by the throat.

CHAPTER II

THE HELL-BOAT

EADE soon found out that he had taken on more than he had bargained for. Though the Chinese was not as tall as himself, and nothing like so heavy, he was a strong man and slippery as an eel; and during the brief struggle he did his best to get at a naked knife he carried at his waist belt.

It was by no means an unfortunate thing for the American that Madame Scala's cry of alarm had the effect of bringing the little Portuguese captain down from the bridge like a terrier after a rat. Eade had put down the hurricane-lamp, and this gave Quental all the light he needed. While passing down the deck, the captain had armed himself with a belaying pin, and with this he dealt the Chinese a blow on the head that knocked him completely out, and very nearly killed him.

Eade was glad enough to extricate himself with no greater damage done than a crumpled shirt; for Quental, wild with excitement, and shouting at the top of his voice in his own language, had laid about him right and left, and it was more by good luck than good management that he had not floored Eade as well.

The American got to his feet, shook himself like a wet dog and then stared at madame.

She stood in a tense attitude, her hands clasped in front of her, her face—even in that dim light—looking whiter than ever. He could see that she was trembling, as if it were only with the greatest effort that she was able to control herself.

"And so you know this man?" he asked.

She seemed not to have heard the question, until she gave a little start and slowly turned to Eade.

"I might have know it," she said, as if speaking to herself. "Liu Tang was certain to have followed me. But how did he come on board?"

"Must have climbed on deck last night," said the other. "He has been hiding in that boat for nearly twenty-four hours, under the tarpaulin."

"I don't mean that," she answered. "I can not think how he got to Singapore in time."

"Then you know where he came from?" Eade exclaimed.

"*Helas!*" she sighed. "I know that—to my cost."

The Chinaman lay upon the deck, stiff and straight as a corpse. And there was a look upon his face that put the wind up John Eade, who had no wish to figure in the Malay newspapers as a witness at a trial for manslaughter.

He went down upon his knees and placed an ear to the unconscious man's heart.

"He's alive, all right," said he, with a sigh of relief. "But if he hasn't got concussion, the fellow must have a skull like a flatiron. What do you propose to do with him now?"

It was to Quental that he spoke—Quental, who was leaning right forward with his elbows on his knees, staring into the immobile, waxen countenance of the Chinese. The expression of the little Portuguese was extraordinary: he looked half frightened and half jubilant, and he was panting like a man who has run a race, his mouth wide open. He still held the belaying pin in his right hand, and seemed to be ready, even eager, to use it again, should his unfortunate victim move so much as an inch.

THE SUDDEN crashing of branches overhead, a kind of roar from the engine room, accompanied by a squelching noise as the paddleblades thrashed heavily into thick, slimy mud—and then a shock that shook the boat from stem to stern and hurled the captain, Eade and Madame Scala to the deck.

A moment afterward Quental was shouting like a maniac.

"My ship!" he cried. "Finish! One damn' serang. Him I leave on the bridge; and now I am ruined—finish!"

At that he lapsed into his own language, a string of exclamations and oaths that seemed to Eade to be all one interminable word.

The little man seemed to have gone raving mad. He danced upon the deck. He slobbered at the mouth. And then, picking up the belaying pin which had fallen fron his hand, he rushed forward as if he would again strike the unconscious Chinese. Indeed, it is possible he might have done so, had not the American intervened.

"It is his fault!" Quental gibbered, getting his words out with difficulty, rolling his eyes. "This damn' Liu Tang. I tell you, yes!"

Then, upon a sudden, he remembered that his proper place was on the bridge, that there might yet be a chance of getting the boat clear of the mud into which all this time she had been ramming her nose like an old sow at a heap of garbage. Still shouting at the top of his voice, he hastened forward, leaving his two passengers alone with the senseless man.

"And so the worst has happened," said Eade, as calmly as he could. "Though it may not have been the captain's fault, this, madame, is what we feared."

She stood motionless, biting her painted lips.

"Some way must be found," she said. "Perhaps Quental will be able to put matters right. He knows I must get to Nolak."

Then she brought her right hand to her left shoulder, and Eade saw her wince.

"You have hurt yourself!" he exclaimed.

"A bruise," she answered. "When I fell, I think, I hit the end of the iron seat. But that is nothing," she went on. "It does not matter."

At that moment, the worthy German appeared on deck, rolling in his gait. When he had gained the head of the ladder, the light from the lantern caught his spectacles and made them look like little headlights.

"Did I not this bredict?" he exclaimed. "Have I not said to dravel by night was a foolishness? And now we are till Kingdom Come here stucked in the mud, and my business goes to die hounds!"

"Time enough to think about that later on," said Eade. "Madame is hurt. She may even have broken her collar bone."

Gottheimer's eyes revolved slowly in the direction of the little French lady.

"Der gollar bone!" he exclaimed. "That is der glavicle. Let me see. I was one time medical student. We go to the saloon where there is better light."

But he had not got half way down the poop steps before he again swelled with indignation. In his own language, and under his breath, he went off with the lady, abusing Quental in particular and the whole Portuguese nation in general.

EADE found himself left alone with the unconscious Chinese. He could hear the captain shouting on the bridge, the engines roaring and straining, the paddle blades lashing and churning deep into the mud. Nothing much could be seen, yet Eade was conscious that the branches of trees overhung the deck, that rattans were tangled in the rigging; the atmosphere was foul with the stench of the mud brought to the surface of the water.

Presently the Chinese moved, rolled his head slowly from one side to the other and then with some difficulty lifted himself upon his elbows, staring at the American.

Eade knelt down by his side.

"Can you speak English?" he asked.

The man nodded.

"Then perhaps you'll answer my questions now. Where do you come from? And what are you doing on board this ship? You had best speak the truth!"

The Chinese's eyes narrowed into the merest slits, though he never shifted his gaze. He was certainly a handsome fellow, though far from pleasant looking. He looked as if he had about as much pity and human sympathy in his composition as a cobra. He replied in almost perfect English.

"I tell you nothing until I know who you are," said he. "Why should I?"

"You're a cool customer, anyway," said Eade. "I'm a passenger on board this ship, if you want to know—and that's all you will know. You seem to have forgotten that you're a stowaway, if you understand what that means."

The other laughed—not as a white man laughs, just a curl of his thin lips and a kind of snarl.

"If I wanted to," said he, "I could take a first class passage from here to Frisco. When I travel I please myself."

Eade was getting interested. He wanted to find out more about this extraordinary man, who was certainly no coolie, but a well educated, high class Chinese. Liu Tang, however, knew how to keep his own counsel; and it is open to question whether Eade would have discovered anything more about him that night, even if Quental had not then returned to the poop, accompanied by his lascar serang—a gray bearded, barefoot seaman from the Malabar coast, with a countenance as brown and wrinkled as a walnut.

When Quental saw that Liu Tang was sitting up, he stepped back quickly and let out an oath, in a breathless, frightened voice.

"Liu Tang, it's queets now, see?" he cried. "I pay you back, yes. But you come aboard my ship without passage money. I put you in irons, savvy? I gotta the law my side, Liu Tang. Hands up, or I shoot you, presto!"

As he spoke, he produced from out of his coat pocket a huge revolver, the biggest Eade had ever seen in his life. Whether or not the little Portuguese was capable of using it to any good effect was another question, for the American observed that Quental's hand was trembling, and though his words were brave enough, there had been a distinct quaver in his voice.

The Chinese, on the other hand, regarded the captain with the utmost scorn. In the lamplight his features were seen to assume a sneer in which there was as much amusement as contempt. At the same time, he did what he was told, though it was only with the greatest difficulty that he succeeded in holding up his hands.

Drawing himself into an upright position, still sitting on the deck, he swayed slightly from side to side, as if he were still dizzy. Quental, with his revolver leveled at Liu Tang, gave orders to the serang who, with the deft hands of a sailor, quickly knotted the two wrists together after he had lowered both arms behind the Chinese's back.

"Now you queeck march," said Quental. "You gotta get up, or I shoot. Lock you up in a safe place, Liu Tang. I gotta the law; you not forget that. I queeck settle a Chinese stowaway. You not do what I say, and I punch a hole right through your stomach, savvy?"

AGAIN EADE feared for the Chinaman's life; for Quental was so obviously frightened that he might let off the gun by mistake at any moment. For the time being, most of Eade's sympathy was on the side of the unfortunate Liu Tang.

"Hold hard a bit!" he intervened. "The fellow can't get up. Guess he's half asleep still, and his head sings like a kettle. If you want to lock the poor devil up, I suppose you're within your rights; but give him a chance, Captain. You can't hit a man when he's down."

"Give him chance!" Quental almost screamed. "That yellow devil! Much

chance he give me. I gotta him now; you make no mistake, mister."

Disregarding the Portuguese, and realizing that his own life was in no little danger, Eade placed his forearms under the Chinese's armpits and lifted him into a standing position. And even then Liu Tang staggered like a drunken man, though he had Eade on one side of him and the serang upon the other.

They led him to a small cubbyhole alongside the cook's galley. The place was unlighted and unventilated, and half filled with all sorts of odds and ends such as coils of rope, paint pots and brushes, oilcans, brooms and holystones. Quental pushed the Chinese over the threshold, then slammed the door, locked it and put the key in his pocket. Then he looked round at Eade and grinned, showing yellow, dirty teeth.

"Gotta him!" he repeated. "Mister, one good night's work, yes!"

"And what about the ship?" asked Eade. "Are we here for good? Will we want a tug to pull us off, or can you manage it yourself?"

The fact that the engines had been silent for some minutes had made Eade think that perhaps Gottheimer was right, and they would never get up to Nolak.

Quental shrugged his shoulders.

"Much dark now," said he. "The mast has fouled the trees, mister. Bimeby, when daylight come I think we got off. The tide up then and that make plenty difference. You trust me, mister. I not want lose my ship.

"Well," said the other, "and are you going to leave that fellow in there all night?"

"More safer place for him," said Quental. "You not know him, mister, same like me. Best thing for you, you go to sleep. No one come up this river. We gotta wait."

AS IT WAS still quite early, Eade had no desire to turn in. He went on to the main deck and lit a cigar, and was there joined after a few minutes by both Madame Scala and Gottheimer, who announced that there was nothing the matter with the lady's shoulder beyond a severe contusion.

The three talked for a while on general topics, Gottheimer becoming almost amiable. And then Madame Scala declared that she had no intention of sleeping anywhere but on deck, as below there was not a breath of air to breathe. Indeed, she had already given orders to the Chinese steward to bring up her mattress and blankets.

As Gottheimer refused to follow her example, saying that he would rather sleep in an oven than be eaten alive by mosquitoes—John Eade was left in a predicament. He knew that he would never get a wink of sleep in his cabin; but, on the other hand, his inexperience of the East led him to think that he ought to consider the proprieties.

When Madame Scala went below to undress, Eade decided to make the most of the few minutes that were left to him and finish his cigar on the poop, which, being well out toward midstream, seemed to be the coolest part of the ship.

There the hurricane lamp was still burning where he himself had placed it on the deck; and there, too, lay the curved knife that had dropped from Liu Tang's hand when Quental knocked him down. Eade picked up that knife and looked at it. It was a murderous looking weapon with a long thin blade and sharp as a razor.

The crew seemed to have turned in. Quental had himself disappeared, probably into his cabin. Eade threw the knife down, the sharp point sticking in the hard teak boards, the ivory handle vibrating like a tuning fork. That made him thank his stars that he had managed to hang on to the Chinese during their struggle. If Liu Tang had got a hand free with that knife, it would have been all up with John Eade.

He sat down on the iron seat where he had sat with Madame Scala, and tried to think the matter out. He wondered who the devil this Liu Tang was. He had evidently come on board the *Chauwe-*

Souris with a definite purpose; and the purpose of a man who carried a weapon like that was not likely to be philanthropic.

Anyway, both the Portuguese captain and the little French lady knew very well who he was—though they preferred to keep their knowledge to themselves.

Eade got to his feet and stretched himself. The mosquitoes were singing about his ears, though the smoke of his cigar kept them at a safe distance. Well, tomorrow, whether or not Quental succeeded in getting the boat off the mud, he would make it his business to find out everything he could. And, if they would tell him nothing, he would make inquiries at Nolak. It was more than likely that his cousin, Charles Cartwright, would be able to clear things up.

With that reflection, and remembering that the lady proposed to monopolize the deck for the night, he resolved to turn in. And at the foot of the steps on the afterwell deck, he came face to face with madame herself.

She was dressed in pajamas of dark silk, and was smoking a cigaret in a long holder, and in her right hand she carried an electric torch.

The Chinese steward came out of the darkness behind her like a ghostly, shapeless bundle. He was loaded up with a mattress and blankets; and little of him was visible, except the ends of his white baggy trousers and his soft felt shoes.

"You're not afraid of the mosquitoes?" Eade asked her.

"Oh, no," she smiled. "I am used to them. Like human beings, they have their preferences. And, besides, there comes a time when one is almost immune. I have lived in the East too many years."

She tripped up the few steps that led to the poop, where Eade heard her giving her instructions to the boy as to exactly where he was to spread her mattress. And then, suddenly, he remembered the knife that he had left on the deck. He had noticed that she had nothing on her feet but a pair of silk bedroom slippers, through which the sharp blade of that bloodthirsty weapon would slice like a razor.

"Look out for that Chinaman's knife!" he cried. "I left it up there. I ought to have taken it away."

She came to the rails above the well-deck and looked down at him.

"That is all right," she laughed. "I have found it and put it on the seat. Quental tells me that Liu Tang is safely under lock and key. That is well—well for us all—and your cousin, Charles," she added. "Sleep well, my good American. You will find it hot in your cabin. If you are wise, you also will come on deck."

"Tell me," he asked, "aren't you frightened to sleep there—almost in the jungle."

She laughed again.

"I do not fear the jungle," she said. "Do not think that I am nervous because I was afraid of Liu Tang. "

SHE DISAPPEARED, and Eade turned and walked amidships. Under the bridge there was a light in the captain's cabin; and looking in through the porthole which gave upon the main deck, he could see Quental stretched out upon his bunk, wearing a suit of very dirty pajamas, uncovered by either blanket or sheet.

If John Eade was going to get at the truth, why not now? Why shouldn't he wake the man up and insist upon knowing why Quental had risked his ship, why he had wanted to kill Liu Tang, and who Liu Tang was? Eade was dead sure that somehow or other his cousin was mixed up in this affair. And, besides, the Portuguese was interfering with the liberty of a citizen of the United States. You couldn't put a patron to great personal inconvenience and refuse to give a reason.

Eade tried the door, and found it both locked and bolted on the inner side. Seizing the handle with both hands, he shook it violently, using all his strength, hoping that the noise would wake the sleeper.

Then he went back to the porthole and

saw the reason why Quental would not wake up. The man lay with his eyes closed and his mouth wide open. For the first time he noticed a sharp, pungent smell that issued through the porthole, and, lying on the floor in front of the berth, he saw an ivory opium pipe. Upon a little table at the bedside was a china bowl in which was a kind of skewer and a small spirit lamp that was still alight.

"Guess he thought he wanted something to calm his nerves," said John Eade to himself. "I thought he was an opium smoker the moment I saw him. Darned fool!"

With that reflection he went below. There was no one to be seen on deck, not even a night watch. The serang, too, had apparently turned in.

He found the heat in his cabin almost insufferable—a kind of wet heat that caused a man to perspire, though he never moved a little finger. The proximity of the engine room made matters worse, though the atmosphere of the night itself was like that of a vapor bath.

The cabin porthole was open when Eade undressed. He could see nothing without, though he was conscious that the thickets and undergrowth of the jungle were tangled and massed against the very side of the ship. He could hear noises, too, continuous and, to him, more or less inexplicable: the ceaseless droning of insects, movements in the water, the stirring of animals in the tree-tops.

He put out the oil lamp which tended to make the room even hotter than it was, and for more than an hour tried in vain to get to sleep. The situation was novel enough to his experience, quite apart from the heat. The little ship on which he found himself was a kind of floating mystery: an opium drugged captain; a little French woman, painted, fascinating and playing some deep game of her own; and finally, a murderous Chinese, with the features of Milton's Satan and the manners of a cultured man, who had got on board as a stowaway!

He had made neither head nor tail of the whole thing when he drifted into a kind of semi-conscious condition that was neither sleep nor wakefulness. He was aware that he tossed continually from one side of his bunk to the other, that once or twice he groaned aloud, and probably swore.

There were brief intervals, however, when he actually did sleep; and from one of these intermittent dozes he awakened with a start, springing from his berth, to find himself standing trembling in the middle of the little cabin.

There was a crash in the jungle outside the porthole, a crash followed by a half smothered, guttural exclamation that might have been an oath. He heard bare feet running lightly, swiftly, on the deck above him. And then, other sounds in the jungle—the breaking of a rotten branch, a splash in the water, and lastly, a momentary flash, like some gigantic will-o'-the-wisp.

JOHN EADE didn't know why he was trembling. He had an idea that something terrible had happened, which might have seemed terrible only because it had got mixed up with something in his dreams—something he couldn't remember. It took him a moment to realize that he wasn't wholly awake; and then, for a few seconds, he was inclined to believe that everything had been only imagination.

He stood listening, and could hear nothing. The jungle was silent now, except for the insects. He could hear no one moving anywhere on board. No sound but the throbbing of the running engines.

Fumbling, he found a box of matches, and lit the lamp. Then he thought that he had best look over the ship, to see if everything was all right. He felt ill at ease; and a breath of air, at any rate, would do him good.

Hastily putting on a pair of slippers, he left his cabin, and passed along the alleyway by the engine room to the after well-deck. There was a sort of moon now, a blurred light in the sky behind the mist. As soon as his eyes had grown accustomed

to the darkness he could make out the dark trees of the jungle. The hurricane-lamp was still burning on the poop, where Madame Scala—he presumed—was asleep.

And then, he saw something that warned him that she couldn't be asleep. From where he stood he could just see the poop deck, upon which two blankets lay wide apart and well away from the mattress, as if they had been cast hurriedly aside.

He was up the steps like a streak of lightning. There was no sign of the little woman there, though he looked everywhere with the help of the lantern. And not only was she gone, but Liu Tang's knife had also disappeared from where Madame Scala had said she had put it—on the iron seat aft of the deckhouse.

Something was wrong—perhaps a tragedy had taken place! He must report at once to Quental. Even then, as he hurried for'ard, it occurred to him that the Chinese might have escaped.

He came breathless to the captain's cabin; in it there was still a light. As before, he looked in through the porthole, and there Ferñao Quental lay in much the same attitude as before. His head had fallen a little further back; his mouth was even more wide open, and one of his arms hung over the edge of the bunk, the hand touching the floor.

Drugged senseless! Oblivious to the world of sentient things. Dreaming, perhaps, in blissful inconsequence and confusion. That much, at least, was suggested by the expression on his face—the lips drawn back upon the teeth, lines at the corners of the eyes. He was like a man who would laugh aloud, had laughed not demanded a certain physical effort that was beyond him. A voluptuary who reposed in some Garden of Armida of his own conception, or who floated upon wings of down through space, like Helios in his golden boat—and there above him, not an inch from his head, driven deep into the woodwork of the cabin, was the gleaming blade of a knife.

Eade knew that knife at a glance. He recognized the ivory handle. It must have been hurled through the porthole with terrific force, for the sharp point was an inch deep in the wood; and the blade had missed Quental's skull by the breadth of a little finger. While the man's subconscious self drifted through an underworld of intangible delights, his physical body had tottered and quavered on the very brink of the grave.

Eade drew back, conscious of alarm, unanswerable questions revolving in his brain like changing colors before the eyes of a man who has stared at too bright a light. Where was Madame Scala? Dead? In the river—to be dragged from the mud by the crocodiles?

He still had the hurricane-lamp that he had brought with him from the poop. Pulling himself together with an effort, he went down the companionway to the cook's galley, to the little cubbyhole in which he had seen Quental lock up the Chinese, Liu Tang.

Sure enough, the door was open. He hadn't expected anything else. The lock had been picked with a stiff piece of wire that the Chinese had not even troubled to remove from the keyhole.

For a moment Eade stood half dazed. He found it difficult to think. Somehow he remembered Gottheimer's phrase; he had come on board a "hell-boat." The steaming heat, the surrounding impenetrable darkness, the very silence punctuated by spasmodic, metallic groanings from the engine room—all served to foster the illusion. He was stranded on the Styx.

CHAPTER III

QUENTAL BECOMES CONFIDENTIAL

EADE'S thoughts flew back to Madame Scala. He remembered her fear of the Chinese, her palpable and abject terror when she had first seen the man, who for some time during that night had been at large on board the *Chauve-Souris*.

If, dead or alive, she were yet anywhere in the ship, she must be found.

Somehow or other he must wake Quental, who was the only man on board who knew the truth.

In something not far from panic the American returned to the deck and again made frantic efforts to break into the captain's cabin. Failing both in that and in getting any sign of life out of the drugged, unconscious man, though he shouted through the porthole at the top of his voice, he hastened for'ard. He walked rapidly, without the least effort, though limbs felt heavy as lead—more or less as a man thinks he walks in a nightmare. When he came to the forecastle he groped his way in the darkness, his nostrils offended by every conceivable smell that ever came out of the East.

Quental's crew had been made up of lascars, Malays and Chinese. Here were the composite odors of tar and opium, of rotten fish and *ghee*, of garlic and perspiration, mingled with human breath scented with betelnut.

Eade struck his head against an iron stanchion; and then, stumbling over a box, saved himself from falling only by bringing a hand down violently upon a greasy, naked chest.

There was an oath. At once the place was Babel. Eade shouted in English, and although they couldn't understand him, they recognized the language; and it was that alone, perhaps, that saved him from a knife.

When a lantern was lit, he saw and recognized the serang, to whom he was able to make himself intelligible, since the lascar boatswain had served on board a British ship plying between London and Bombay.

"Come here," said he. "I want you."

The man followed him to the main deck. He heard what had happened without emotion, though he nodded his head from time to time to let the American know that he understood. It took Eade a long time to impress upon the lascar the importance, even the necessity, of waking up the captain, and that without delay.

With some reluctance the serang went back to the forecastle, to return in less than a minute carrying an ax and accompanied by several inquisitive members of the crew. For all that, he dared not break down the door himself, but left that to Eade.

One blow was enough to shatter the lock and splinter the woodwork of the jamb. The noise caused Quental to sit up and half open his eyes. When Eade entered the cabin, the captain looked at him with a dazed, silly expression.

John Eade caught the Portuguese by the shoulders and shook him so violently that his head rocked backward and forward on a limp, scraggy neck, rather like that of a dead fowl.

"Pull yourself together, you darned fool!" he cried. "Look at that knife, and realize that you're lucky to be alive. More than that, Madame Scala has vanished and that Chinaman has escaped!"

These three items of stupendous news took time to filter into Quental's drugged and sluggish brain. He stared at the knife with an inane expression, and then gave a kind of snigger, proving thereby that even yet he failed to realize its significance.

Eade repeated what he had said, shouting word for word in the captain's ear, Quental now sitting up upon his bunk with his dirty, skinny feet upon the floor.

"Liu Tang!" he exclaimed at last. "Escaped! Mister, I think you make joke, yes?"

He had gone white in the face.

Eade seized him by a wrist and dragged him to his feet.

"Come and see for yourself," said he. "You'll come to your senses all right, when you get the shock of your life."

FORCIBLY he dragged the captain along the deck of his own ship, and then pushed him stumbling down the companionway. The exercise had the desired effect: Quental began to regain the use of his limbs, his memory and his voice. When he saw the open door of the cubbyhole, it was as if he had received a

violent blow in the pit of the stomach, for he gasped and leaned back against the wall of the alleyway, breathing heavily.

He mumbled a few words in his own language—oaths, probably—or invocations to the saints. Then he realized that he would have to be practical, that something would have to be done.

"Madame!" he cried. "You say she gone?"

"I left her on the poop," said the other, "where she said she was going to sleep. She isn't there now; and so far as I can see she's nowhere on board."

Quental, still leaning against the wall, began to gnaw his fingernails.

"Liu Tang wouldn't kill her!" he shivered. "Scala not let him."

At the same time Eade could not fail to detect a want of confidence in his voice. The man was not so much stating a fact, as asking himself a question. Suddenly Quental flew into a temper. The vital part of him revived. Straightening himself, trembling all over, he stamped with his bare feet like a bad tempered child.

"Your fault, mister!" he cried. "I kill Liu Tang, if you no stop me. Now I gotta pay for it. Liu Tang not miss another time. Oh, mister, Ferñao Quental and dead man—all same thing, savvy?"

His rage was snuffed out of him like a candle, and he was on the point of blubbering, when Eade again seized him by the shoulders.

"Try to be a man!" he cried, "or as near to it as you can get. You're in command of this ship, aren't you? Well, get a move on! Have the boat searched from stem to stern. For all you or I know, the lady may still be somewhere on board. You don't even know that that Chinaman himself isn't hiding somewhere."

That startled Quental again; but a moment after, he slowly shook his head, half despondent, half relieved.

"Damn' sure thing him go," he observed. "Liu Tang gone into jungle. Was madame dressed?"

"Pajamas," said Eade. "And silk slippers. Old Gottheimer wasn't far wrong when he called this thing a hell-boat!"

Quental climbed up the companionway, sagging at the knees, as if all the strength had gone out of him, half pulling himself up by grasping the brass rail.

On deck he found the serang and gave him his orders. The whole crew was now on the main deck, several with lanterns, With the light on their faces they looked a strange collection—every cast of countenance the Malay States can produce; some evil, some fierce, many grinning, all curious.

DURING the next five minutes a systematic search was made from one end of the paddle-boat to the other. Even the engine room was not neglected. And then the serang returned to the main deck, saluted and reported that no trace of either the lady or the Chinese could be found.

Quental looked at Eade, his jaw dropped, his eyes staring. As before, his first thought was for his own safety.

"Mister," said he, in a hushed, tremulous voice, "if we not getta the boat off the mud, perhaps Liu Tang come back again!"

"Look here," said the American, "it's about time I knew the truth. And I'm going to get it! You knew this Liu Tang before ever he came on board this ship. Just you tell me where?"

"In Singan," said Quental, hanging his head.

"And where's that?"

"Island, mister," said the captain. "Macassar Straits, 'tween Celebes and Borneo."

"And did Madame Scala come from there?"

The captain hesitated, shifting upon his feet, and again began to bite his fingernails.

"Come on!" cried the American. "Speak out! Did Madame Scala come from this place, Singan? I have a sort of idea she did."

"That's right, mister," Quental confessed.

"And who is she?"

"Wife of Battista Scala, mister; the daughter of Bernard Le Camus."

"Is this Battista Scala still alive?"

Quental shrugged his shoulders.

"May be, mister; may not be. In a place like Singan, a man may die any minute—when there 're ver' many who wisha him dead."

"And what do all these people do, on an island away out in the Macassar Straits?"

The captain leered, as if to give the suggestion that he was no such fool as his interrogator thought him.

"I know better than to say that," said he. "I no ask your business, mister. I think best I know nothing about what happen in Singan, savvy?"

Eade was silent a moment. He had already found out more than he had expected, and realized the advisability of not appearing merely inquisitive. For a few moments he considered possibilities.

"Come, tell me," he asked, "did you ever come across a man in Singan of the name of Charles Cartwright?"

"'Course, mister," said the other. "That man the bottom of all the dam' trouble. We gotta him away, when Scala want his blood. I no go back there after that. I gotta more dam' sense."

"Did any one else help Cartwright to escape?"

"Yes. Madame Scala. I betta Liu Tang come 'board my ship killa me and try find Cartwright."

At that John Eade received something in the nature of a shock.

"Do you know," he exclaimed, "that Charles Cartwright—who is my cousin—is up at Nolak now?"

Quental looked up quickly.

"So, mister!" said he, appearing more or less unconcerned. "Then he good as dead man already." And then the recollection of his own narrow escape caused him to shiver. "Thank God I locka my door!" he exclaimed. "Lui Tang couldn't get in my cabin. I think he gotta very little time to spare. That's why he make throw the knife through porthole."

"And who is this Liu Tang?" asked Eade.

"He do alla dirty jobs for Battista Scala," said Quental. "They work together, mister—handa glove, as you say. Nobody care what they do in Singan."

"And who's the other man you mentioned?" Eade went on with his questioning. "You spoke of a certain Bernard Le Camus as being Madame Scala's father. What's his business on this out of the way island?"

Quental held up a dirty thumb, and then pointed it downward to the deck, after the manner of a spectator in a Roman amphitheater.

"Scala gotta Le Camus just like that," said he. "Yes, mister. Old man can do nothing. They drugga him; all time he smoka opium. He's frightened of Scala same like everybody else. Battista Scala ver' handsome, ver' strong, big man. Ver' fond women—all kinds, yes. But he much love his wife, and she no afraid of him. I seen that, mister, plenty time."

"Anyway," suggested Eade, "looks as if she has run away from her husband now?"

"May be," said the other. "I think she kinda caught on to this Cartwright. He never gotta away from Singan, mister, if it no been for Madame Scala. Scala savvy that. That's why Liu Tang come after her and Cartwright."

EADE sighed. On the face of things, it looked as if he would never set on his cousin alive. At any rate, if anything could be done to save Charles, there was no time to waste; it was a dead sure thing that the Chinese had gone overboard into the jungle.

"Well, Captain Quental," said he, "I'm much obliged to you for your confidence. You and I ought to work together. I may tell you that, if you can do anything to save my cousin's life you'll not regret it. I came out here specially to find him."

"I no think you will," said the Portuguese, with a degree of finality that was

not a little disconcerting. "Liu Tang, he getta up to Nolak all right. He knows this dam' country, and speak Malay."

"There's the boat," said Eade. "I'm ready to go up the river and can start at once. I can kill two birds with one stone, so to speak—warn my cousin that his life's in danger and get whatever help I can for you."

Quental thought for a moment. To some extent he had regained his presence of mind, but he still greatly agitated. Never for long could he go without biting his nails, and he kept glancing nervously from one side to the other, as if he suspected that some one might spring at him at any moment.

"You getta upstream in boat, mister. I give you two good men to row. You can't miss Nolak—only few miles away."

As soon as he had given his orders to the serang he went back to his whining and reproaches.

"I killa that dam' Chinaman if you not stop me, presto," he complained. "If you finda your cousin with throat cut, your fault, mister."

"Oh, dry up!" cried Eade, losing all patience with the man. "How long before daylight? If you lose no time in lowering the boat, I might get to Nolak before Liu Tang. At any rate there may be a chance."

Quental shrugged his shoulders.

"The boat alla ready, mister, soon's you are," said he. "I think, ver' like I getta the boat off the mud under her own steam when the tide's up."

"Tell me what you really think," asked Eade. "What's become of madame?"

"Looks like she's dead, mister. If she try make the alarm, Liu Tang perhaps killa her and throw body overboard."

Eade strode into the captain's cabin and, using all his strength, wrenched the knife out of the wooden wall.

"There's no blood on this," said he.

"That make proof nothing," said Quental. "She cry out, Liu Tang catch hold her throat, strangle her, presto. Easy work—and ver' quick."

EADE shuddered as he went below to his cabin. He had certainly heard a splash in the water. Could that have been Madame Scala's dead body? He couldn't believe that true—the little woman to whom he had talked at dinner but a few hours before, who had rather fascinated him. If this was the East, he thanked God he didn't have to live in the country.

He was sweating profusely as he scrambled into his clothes. Before he left his cabin he took the precaution of putting a small automatic pistol into one of his pockets and a handful of cartridges into the other.

Five minutes later, he was swinging through the darkness up the river, the silence disturbed only by the sweep of the oars in the strong hands of two lascar seamen.

He made no attempt to steer. Seated in the stern, he held the rudder taut, and left the boat in charge of the two oarsmen, each of whom glanced repeatedly from side to side, whispering directions to one another. There was a moon now, screened by a thick, watery mist; as the river narrowed, the branches of the tall *tapang* trees on both sides almost touched overhead.

To John Eade minutes seemed like hours. With the approach of dawn there came a cool damp breeze that caused the foliage in the jungle to rustle—an uncanny sound because it was indefinite and yet everywhere. The perspiration with which his shirt was saturated quite suddenly became cold, and he began to shiver, his teeth chattering, and he could feel his heartbeats racing and his throat dry as sand.

CHAPTER IV

IN CARTWRIGHT'S BUNGALOW

THE APPROACH of daylight brought John L. Eade to the realization of two very different facts—the superb beauty of the Malay jungle and the circumstance that he had con-

tracted a chill. And strangely enough, the one seemed to be not altogether disconnected with the other. The very fact that he knew himself to be feverish seemed in some way to account for the exotic scenery, the profuse extravagance and variety of the vegetation. Here was something that he had never experienced in his life before, something altogether different from the American forests or the Australian bush.

The prodigality of Nature almost frightened him. Looking upward into the density of the undergrowth almost from the level of the water, he thought the jungle more amazing, even more savage looking and impenetrable, than when he had seen it from the deck of the *Chauve-Souris*.

There was something not real about it all, something in keeping with his fevered blood and quickening pulse. The two lascars now looked neither to the right nor left. With short, quick strokes they plied their oars in unison, the sweat dripping from beneath their faded blue turbans, while they muttered, rather than sang, a haunting song, so monotonous in its melody and so repetitious in its words that to Eade it was like the persistent beating of a tomtom.

Beyond a sharp, almost right-angle bend, the river broadened out to more than three times its former width; and there, upon the left bank, was Nolak—or at least enough evidence to prove to Eade that he had reached his destination.

Three bamboo jetties projected into the water, between which were clustered some score of native craft, river proas and canoes. As the boat drew nearer, two or three *attap* thatched bungalows came into view, standing upon high ground half cleared of trees, about a quarter of a mile from the river bank. One of them stood out upon the skyline against the red of dawn; with its floor raised about six feet above the ground, supported upon strong poles, it looked like some quaint, gigantic, prehistoric insect standing upright upon stiff, jointless legs.

To the left of this was an open clearing across which ran a broad, well made road of red gravel that ascended another hillock, more or less devoid of vegetation save for a few scattered palm trees, beneath which were several barrack-like buildings constructed of wood and also thatched with palm leaves, all exactly similar in their dimensions, and so arranged that they formed two lateral streets.

Upon the same hillside were scores of chickens and goats, while here and there among the huts native women and children were to be seen, the former gossiping in groups. These were women of all ages, dressed in flowing, dirty robes that depended from the left shoulder. The hair of many hung down to below their waists, and their skin was black as jet.

On the far side of the clearing, immediately facing the jetties, was a long low building that was evidently a factory and drying shed; and not far from this were one or two smaller and better built houses that had the unmistakable appearance of offices. Beyond the factory, between the two hillocks, one could obtain a glimpse of the gently rising ground that marked a plantation of young rubber trees, where a gang of coolies was to be seen at work.

THE LASCARS ran the boat alongside the central jetty, and then, shipping their oars, produced dirty looking bundles that contained a mixture of rice and fish, which they proceeded to eat by the primitive method of scooping it into their mouths with their fingers. They had fulfilled their part of the transaction. They were no longer concerned with John Eade. Having infinite respect for the capacities of the white man, whose ways were not their ways, who was in all things incomprehensible, they were not even curious.

Eade climbed out of the boat, the rickety jetty creaking and swaying beneath his weight. He had not the least idea where to go, but had little doubt that sooner or later he would come across some one who could tell him where he

would find Charles Cartwright or the manager of the estate.

Three or four Tamil children, playing with empty coconut shells in a puddle of mud, desisted from their game to stare at him in awed astonishment. A little farther on he came across a Chinese, who could give him no better information than a "No savvy!" and a look of contempt. The offices appeared to be deserted, until Eade entered without knocking a small room in which an Indian clerk, dressed in a white duck suit that looked much too tight for comfort and wearing a white sun helmet well on the back of his head, was seated writing at a desk.

"Can you tell me, please," asked the American, "if I shall find a Mr. Charles Cartwright here?"

The clerk, who was a Telegu, a Hindu and a person of no little importance in his own estimation—if in nobody's else—got to his feet.

"An affirmative reply, sir," he exclaimed, with a heartiness that almost took Eade's breath away. "Mr. Cartwright has the responsible charge of Number Two division. A considerable mileage from headquarters even as the crow flies. But I can send out for him, if your esteemed business is at all precipitous?"

He was too concerned with his cousin's safety to note the man's extraordinary choice of words.

"Is Mr. Cartwright's bungalow far from here?" he asked.

The Telegu pointed out of the window, toward the hill downstream upon which Eade had seen the bungalows.

"The second of those residences, sir, is officially deputed to the assistant manager responsible for division Number Two."

"At what time should Mr. Cartwright have left his bungalow this morning?"

"At a quarter to five, sir, though of course some procrastination may have unavoidably delayed him."

Eade thought for a moment, his fingers to his lips.

"It would be dark then," said he, as if to himself, and then to the clerk, "Do you know for a fact that Mr. Cartwright *did* go out to the estate this morning?"

The Telegu stared at him in astonishment, his sleepy eyes opening sufficiently to display white rims of eyeballs. At the same time he leaned forward on the table; and the American noticed his refined, almost feminine hands, the tapering fingers terminating in lead coloured finger nails.

"I see, sir, you anticipate some bitter pill," the clerk interposed.

"Sure," said the other. "Mr. Cartwright is my cousin. I've come out from the United States to find him; and while on my way up this river I learned that his life is in very serious danger."

The Telegu threw up his hands, palpably alarmed.

"You don't say so," he exclaimed. "Sir, that is almost well nigh inconceivable. Mr. Cartwright is so jolly popular. By gosh, sir, you have indeed hurled a blue bolt at me!"

"Look here," said Eade, "you and I had better go up to Mr. Cartwright's bungalow right now. It may startle you to hear it, but there's some reason to fear that the worst has happened. He may have been murdered during the night."

The clerk flew to the door.

"Sir, I stir my stumps!" he cried. And then, suddenly looking frightened again, he hesitated. "You have a weapon?" he asked.

Eade produced his automatic, the sight of which gave the man some confidence.

"In an uncivilized vicinity," said he, "self-defense is a good egg. You may take my word for that, sir."

ON THE WAY up the hill, along the broad, red road, he plied Eade with questions. The American told the clerk that the boat on which he had come upriver lay stranded some miles downstream, and that a Chinese stowaway had gone overboard into the jungle with the deliberate intention of getting to Nolak to murder Cartwright. When he had left the ship, the man had certainly been unarmed; but if there were

villages in the jungle, he might have got hold of a Malay *kris* en route.

"There is no Malay village anywhere approximate," said the Telegu. "Farther back in the hills there are Orang Benua—dirty black men, sir," he added.

The tones of his voice suggested the utmost contempt and disgust. Eade regarded him with surprised amusement, for the clerk's complexion was a rich chocolate brown.

At the top of the hill the road was overhung by palm trees. On the right was a row of four or five bungalows, each surrounded by its own garden, a lawn of well-mown kiss grass and formal beds, gay with tropical flowers. The veranda of each bungalow was decorated with orchids in hanging baskets, as well as with various kinds of trailing plants and ferns.

The Telegu halted at the bottom of the steps of the second bungalow. He was plainly scared; there was a kind of leaden color about his gills, and he kept tugging nervously at his long mustache.

"After you, sir," he bowed. "Pray go first. Let us hope there's no fat in the fish kettle," he observed. "That would be terrible!"

Eade was wise enough to take his automatic from his pocket before he ascended the steps to the veranda. He had seen enough of Liu Tang to be prepared to shoot at sight!

The bungalow consisted of but three rooms—a long oblong room that extended across the whole front and two smaller rooms at the back, each having doors into the front room and connecting one with another. The big room was furnished as a sitting and dining room, the chairs being basketwork. Of the two rooms at the back, one was Charles Cartwright's bedroom, and the other, a guest room from which there were steps that descended to a bathroom below the floor.

While Eade searched the place cautiously on tiptoe, the Telegu waited at the head of the steps apparently ready to fly for his life at the first sign of danger.

Neither in the sitting room nor in Cartwright's bedroom was there any sign of life, save scores of lizards upon both the walls and the canvas ceiling that sagged under the *attap* roof. But in the other room he came unexpectedly upon a Chinese coolie seated on an empty packing case, whitening a pair of tennis shoes, who was startled out of his life at the sight of an armed intruder. Failing to make the boy understand a word he said, Eade returned to the doorway and managed to persuade the clerk to enter. The Telegu came in shivering, glancing about him nervously and with his back to a wall, moving sidewise like a crab.

When he saw the coolie, who could not have been much more than sixteen years of age, he immediately gained confidence, asked him one or two questions in the dictatorial tones of a schoolmaster, and then interpreted to Eade.

"He says that no one has come here since Mr. Cartwright went out," he declared. "That was before daybreak this morning. He says we will fish out Cartwright's boy from the kitchen. The boy can speak English. He will tell you anything you want to know."

Following the coolie, they went down the few wooden steps into the bathroom—a wooden tub in a bare room with a concrete floor, a water tap protruding from the wall and shower bath.

From this place there was a small door that led into the garden across which a gravel path led straight to the outbuilding which comprised the servants' sleeping quarters and the kitchen.

Here, in a semi-dark, steaming room, where the air was alive with flies whose buzzing was almost deafening, were two Chinese—a short fat cook and a tall thin "boy", or personal servant—as well as the Malay *kerboon* who should have been at work in the garden.

As the American had no wish to remain in that atmosphere longer than he had to, he asked the boy to step out into the garden, where he received prompt and intelligent answers in pidgin English to his questions.

Mr. Cartwright had gone out to his work as usual that morning at a quarter

to five, and would not return to the bungalow till twelve o'clock for tiffin. After he had been called, Mr. Cartwright had had his *chota hazri*. He never took very long to dress, as he never shaved until he came home at midday. He always rode a bicycle up to his division; and sometimes when there was much work to be done his lunch was taken out to him. As Mr. Cartwright had given no such orders that morning, he was certain to return to the bungalow at about twelve o'clock.

Eade gave a sigh of relief. If Cartwright was at work on the estate with a gang of Tamil coolies, his life could be in no immediate danger, especially as the boy informed him that his master invariably carried a revolver.

THE AMERICAN was in two minds what to do: He might take a walk along the road, to meet Cartwright coming back, or he might remain in the bungalow and await his cousin's arrival. He did not feel in the least disposed to adopt the former course. Having had little or no sleep during the night, he was dead tired; and besides, the sun was now well up and the heat terrific. On the other hand, it occurred to him that to wait in the bungalow might involve a certain amount of personal risk. Presumably Liu Tang was still on his way to Nolak through the jungle and might arrive at any moment.

The circumstance that he still had a temperature made Eade disinclined to walk even a short distance. He felt a kind of heaviness in his limbs and every joint in his body ached. All he wanted to do was to fling himself down upon a bed, quench his thirst and drop off to sleep.

On his returning to the bungalow, a cursory inspection of the place at once suggested a compromise. There were but two entrances to the building—the steps up to the veranda, and the door into the bathroom. The latter could be locked from the inner side; and having done this, Eade was careful to put the key in his pocket. As an additional precaution, he lowered the trapdoor which had stood open at the head of the bathroom steps in the spare room; and, assisted by the Chinese boy—to whom he explained the situation—he moved the chest of drawers to the top of this.

He had barred that way all right. In military parlance, his flanks and rear were secure. The Telegu clerk, before returning to his office, assured him that he could trust both the Chinese boy and the coolie to keep a sharp look-out on all sides of the bungalow. Feeling tolerably safe, Eade asked the boy for some quinine, swallowed fifteen grains, and then lay down on one of the long chairs on the veranda with a big tumbler of well iced tonic water and his loaded pistol on a small wickerwork table close at hand.

He had placed himself immediately facing the steps, up which no one could ascend without being seen. At the same time he realized that he would have to exercise a certain amount of will power to keep himself awake. There were two or three shelves of books in the sitting room; but he had no desire to read.

JOHN EADE lay in that long chair for more than three hours, with nothing but his thoughts for company, and the lizards of all sizes that swarmed in the bungalow.

He had plenty to think about. The very fact that, if he fell asleep he might have his throat cut or be shot with his own gun, was enough to keep him awake. He was free to puzzle his brains to his heart's content, to ask himself riddles he knew he couldn't answer.

The mystery of the island of Singan. The extraordinary people who lived there, whom Quental had described: Batista Scala and Bernard Le Camus, Madame Scala's father. And what has happened to madame herself? She had vanished as suddenly and unaccountably as if she had been spirited away. And why had Charles been obliged to fly for his life from the island? Was it jealousy on Scala's part that had made him send Liu Tang to the Yalai River or was there

some other motive at the back of it?

Eade, perplexed and baffled, reminded himself that he had but to wait a little longer. He was bound to learn the truth from Charles as soon as his cousin arrived.

Suddenly, a new fear possessed him. The road to the estate led through the jungle. What, if Liu Tang attacked Charles Cartwright on his way home—lay in wait for him and took him by surprise? It was easy enough to knock a man off a bicycle. A stick thrust into the spokes was enough.

Eade called the boy, whose name he had discovered to be Ah Yen.

"Is Mr. Cartwright ever late?" he asked.

"Always about same time," said the Chinese. "Him come few minutes now. I catch his shaving water, and then lay table for tiffin. Master wantchee me lay two places?" he asked.

"You may as well," said Eade, "though I don't feel inclined to eat much."

The boy went into the bedroom, and in less than a minute returned. So far as a Chinese's face can express anything, he appeared to be more concerned than surprised.

"Master got Mr. Cartwright's razor?" he asked.

"Razor!" Eade exclaimed. "Of course not. Why?"

"No can find," said the Chinese, with a conclusive shrug of the shoulders.

Eade got to his feet.

"You had better look for it," said he. "What kind of a razor is it? A safety razor?"

"No," said the boy. "Mr. Cartwright use backward razor, all same number one size pocket knife."

"Well," said Eade, "he had it yesterday, I suppose?"

"I see it last night, dinner time, on the dressing table," said the Chinese. "'Member very well, master. Mr. Cartwright go out to dinner, and I tidy up. Look see all belong proper."

Eade stared at the boy in astonishment.

"You're dead sure you saw this razor last night?" he asked.

"Certain sure, master."

"And it's nowhere in the bungalow now?"

"Make look see everywhere," said the boy. "No can find."

Eade was silent a moment.

"My God!" he exclaimed, half under his breath. "Then somebody has been here just before or just after sunrise!"

When he tried to think, he realized that owing to a splitting headache, it was as much as he could do to arrive at the simplest logical deduction. If the razor had been stolen, it was more than probable that it had been stolen by Liu Tang. If Charles had been called by his servant at half past four, and had left for the estate at about a quarter to five, then Liu Tang must have got to the bungalow somewhere between the latter hour and sunrise, which would be about six o'clock. It looked as if Liu Tang had taken the razor that he might use it as an effective weapon when an opportunity presented itself.

And if that were so, where was Liu Tang now? He was not in the bungalow—that was a certainty. He must be hiding somewhere in the jungle; and there was certainly a chance that he might intend to attack Cartwright on his way home upon an unfrequented road.

Eade's nerves were all on edge. He felt the want of sleep; he had a touch of fever; the situation in which he found himself, besides being novel to his experience, was something in the nature of a climax.

SOFT, unsteady footsteps upon the steps that led to the veranda caused him to swing round in alarm, holding his pistol ready to fire. For a second he was convinced that he was about to find himself face to face with Liu Tang, the would-be murderer of his cousin. The footsteps he had heard had been quick and shuffling—those of one who has bare feet, or who wears light, soft shoes.

He beheld, instead, a sight that was at once amazing and pathetic. More than half way up the steps, clutching the rail

for support as if to prevent herself from falling, full in the tropic sunlight, stood Madame Scala.

The brilliant sunshine framed her slender figure as in gold. In a way, this was an apotheosis of the woman he had last seen on board the *Chauve-Souris*, when he had looked up at her from the well-deck.

Her face was drawn and haggard, even smeared with blood, which had dried upon the powder on her cheeks. Her scarlet lips were drawn back as if she suffered pain. The thin silk pajama suit that she was wearing had been torn by thorns in a dozen places, and her flimsy shoes were cut to ribbons.

She looked half savage, half martyr; and yet she had lost little of her beauty. There was a wild expression in her eyes, like that of a hunted thing. It was evident that she was so exhausted and so weak that it was as much as she could do to stand.

As with a great effort, she dragged herself up the few remaining steps. Recognizing Eade, she came forward, tottering, with both hands stretched out in front of her. And what struck John Eade as the most incongruous thing about her was a gold wrist-watch studded with diamonds.

"You! Here!" she exclaimed. "Oh, tell me—Charles, he is safe?"

"So far as I know," said Eade. "But you! Madame, you must lie down and rest."

He had moved toward her, when she drew back a step, and passed a hand across her eyes.

"And Liu Tang has not come?" she asked.

"Not so far as we know," said the American.

"The *bon Dieu* be praised! Monsieur, I was asleep—you remember where you left me, on the deck. I woke up with a start. I do not know why. I saw the face of Liu Tang—that devil's face—quite close to me—in the moonlight. I think I shrieked; and then he fled. It took me a moment to recover myself. I heard him trying to force his way into Quental's cabin. I saw him struggling to open the door. But when I came upon the main deck, he saw me and threw the knife through the cabin porthole. Is Quental dead?" she asked, suddenly breaking off.

"No," said Eade. "He missed—by the fraction of an inch."

She gave a sigh of relief, and went on with her story.

"Liu Tang sprang overboard into the jungle like a wildcat. I knew what he meant to do—to come here, to kill Charles. And I know, too, from whom he got his orders."

"And you went in pursuit of him!" Eade exclaimed. "Madame, you were mad!"

She leaned for support against the back of the chair in which John Eade had spent the greater part of the morning.

"Yes, monsieur, I was mad, desperate," she said. "I did not care what happened to me; I did not wait to think. I tried to jump ashore, but one foot went into the water, into the mud. I had my electric torch in my right hand. I switched it on and saw where I was. I caught hold of a bough of a tree, pulled myself out of the water and hurried after Liu Tang. For a few minutes I could hear him in front of me, breaking his way through the jungle. But soon after I had come to a narrow path, I lost him. He is strong, that man—he is like a leopard."

She paused, as if she wanted breath, and then tried to draw her silken shreds of clothing closer about her stooping, sylph-like body. Eade's feelings toward her were a mixture of bewilderment, pity and admiration. His own fears and troubles were forgotten.

"You must rest, madame!" he insisted. "You might have killed yourself!"

"A moment. I must tell you all," she went on. "Mile upon mile, hour after hour! Oh, my good friend, the never ending jungle, it is awful! I did not know where I was going. I just followed the path, and went on, and on, and on. My torch went out; but when daylight came I could see better. And then I met a Malay who told me the way to Nolak. From the way he looked at me, I could see that he thought I was mad, and

for that reason he was frightened of me."

She had spoken in a quick, breathless voice; and having finished her story, she closed her eyes for a moment, and then opened them and looked round the veranda, as if she saw everything there for the first time.

"But it is impossible," said she, "that Liu Tang is not here! He must have been miles in front of me."

"That's true enough," said Eade. "If the man has been here at all, it was more than six hours ago."

"Then he has come!" she cried, in new alarm.

"Madame, I know nothing for certain. But to tell you the truth, there's evidence that he may have come and gone."

Again she carried her hand to her heart.

"I fear for Charles," she said.

A heavy step on the veranda caused them both to turn. John Eade recognized his cousin at once, though he had not seen him for more than twenty years. Well over six feet in height, clean shaven, fair haired and powerfully built, Cartwright looked younger than his years. He was wearing breeches and puttees, a flannel shirt open at the neck and a pith helmet. He stood at the head of the steps with his legs wide parted. He glanced first at Eade and then at the lady. Though he had not the remotest idea who his cousin was, he recognized Madame Scala at once.

"Valèrie!" he cried.

She turned quickly gave him one glance and then closed her eyes.

"Thank God, you are safe!" she breathed, in a voice little above a whisper.

And had John Eade not caught her in his arms, she would have fallen to the ground.

CHAPTER V

NEWS OF BATTISTA SCALA

IT WAS as if the life had gone out of her. Her powers of endurance had been taxed to the utmost. By sheer will power alone she had managed to tell Eade the greater part of her story; and nothing but anxiety and suspense had kept her going, until the tension was suddenly relieved and she had fallen forward in a swoon.

When John Eade made known his identity to his cousin, Cartwright showed little or no surprise. His sole concern seemed to be for Madame Scala, whom he took from Eade's arms, and for a moment stood irresolute as if he didn't know what to do with her.

"I'll take her to Mrs. Headley," said he. "She's certain to be at home now, in the heat of the day. Headley's our manager," he went on to explain. "His wife'll look after her. There's not a doctor within ten miles of us."

Eade went to the head of the steps and looked up and down the road. He had no particular object in doing so. He merely felt that he wanted to do something, and could think of nothing that could be in any way useful, just as he could think of nothing to say.

He saw the red road in the glaring light—shadowless, though it ran like an avenue between towering trees. The sun's rays were vertical. The elongated, glaucous leaves of a shrub at the foot of the veranda steps shone in the glare as if they were of silver.

Not far away, leaning against the low fence that divided the garden of Cartwright's bungalow from that next door, was a man whose personal appearance was as unprepossessing as it was singular. Had that not been so, John Eade would not have looked at him twice, instead of staring at him, as he did, for the best part of a minute.

At first he could not decide whether the man was an Asiatic or a European. He was certainly dressed like a white man, in a dust colored suit of crumpled Shantung silk that included even a waistcoat. He wore both a soft collar and a necktie, as well as a white sun-helmet.

His face, however, was that of a Mongol. For he had Chinese eyes—extraordinary big eyes, but almond shaped—beneath which were repulsive looking

blue sacs that made him resemble some sort of loathsome reptile.

He had, also, the cadaverous complexion of a corpse, high cheek-bones, thin lips half concealed by a straggling and very thin mustache, the few hairs of which drooped downward to the corners of his chin.

He did not appear to have anything definite to do. He was smoking a cigaret in a holder, which it appeared to be too much trouble for him to hold in his teeth, for the thing hung down so far that the lighted end was in danger of touching the lapel of his coat. Both his hands were thrust deep into his trouser pockets. His whole attitude suggested indolence; and yet Eade had not failed to notice that he was regarding Cartwright's bungalow in a furtive, suspicious way.

At that moment Charles himself appeared on the steps, carrying Madame Scala, whose slim body he had wrapped around in a sheet taken from his bed.

"Come on! To Headley's!" he exclaimed, as he brushed past. "His bungalow's not more than half a mile away."

He was down the steps in no time, and turned to the right upon the road. That took him to within a few feet of the man who stood loitering between the two bungalows; and no sooner was Cartwright abreast of him than he stopped stone dead.

"WHAT the devil do you want here?" he asked savagely.

The man took his cigaret from his mouth. Still leaning against a post, he exerted himself to the extent of shifting his balance from one foot to the other and removing a hand from his pocket.

"You," said he. He pointed at the white, shapeless object in Cartwright's arms. "Who's that?" he asked.

"Mind your own damn' business!" cried the other, with an oath. "And be off! You're the last man on earth I want to see at any time, and least of all now."

With that Charles hurried on, moving from the center of the roadway to the grass at the side, under the shade of the palms. And as he walked he hurled questions over a shoulder to his cousin, who found it was as much as he could do to keep up with him. Cartwright was told the bare facts of what had happened: the discovery of Liu Tang on board the *Chauve-Souris;* the stranding of the paddle-boat; the escape of the Chinese, and Madame Scala's pursuit of him, clad only in pajamas.

By that time they had reached a big bungalow standing in a well kept and spacious garden. Passing up a drive that formed a semicircle, they came suddenly within sight of the house, before the veranda of which stood a high wheeled gig, with a Malay *syce* holding the pony's head.

"Headley's there himself," said Cartwright. "He tiffins early and then drives round the estate in the heat of the day, the idea being—from what I know of him—to cultivate a thirst."

The manager of the Nolak Estate, a little bald headed fellow who had run to fat in the East, met them on the steps. Cartwright hastily explained so much as he knew of the situation. A lady he had known in Singan had tried to find her way alone to Nolak through the jungle, the boat on which she had come upriver being stranded some way downstream. She had fainted from exhaustion, but had recovered consciousness before he left his bungalow. All he wanted was to ask Mrs. Headley to look after her; if necessary, some one could be sent to Bukit Tirah for the doctor.

Headley, who looked as mystified as a man with a cheery, almost circular face can, declared that his wife would undoubtedly do everything in her power. And no sooner were the words out of his mouth than Cartwright went straight into the bungalow, leaving John Eade to introduce himself.

There followed further interrogations, Eade using his discretion as to what extent to confide in his cousin's superior. Headley, however, appeared to be a man who took life as he found it, who had

lived long enough in the East to be surprised at nothing.

"Looks as if your cousin had got himself into a fix," he observed. "We're more or less used to that sort of thing out here. An Indian June from one year's end to the other, you know; and you may remember that Kipling says something or other about married women and new pianos. However, that's not my affair; and I suppose it don't matter a great lot to you."

He offered Eade a drink which the American accepted. According to Headley, whisky was the one great panacea for malaria and all the other ills of the Orient. Whenever he got anything the matter with him—which was seldom enough—why, he just drank it out.

Except that his face was somewhat colorless and pasty, he looked healthy enough; and anyway, he was brim full of vital energy and humor. While waiting for his cousin, Eade availed himself of the opportunity to tell Headley of the fate of the *Chauve-Souris* and to ask if anything could be done to get the paddle-boat out of the mud.

"We've no tugs here," said the manager. "I know that little packet well; and I don't mind telling you her reputation's none of the best. But I'll send a message to Quental; and if a gang of coolies can help him, they can go down on our launch."

Upon Cartwright's return, Headley kept the two men nearly half an hour, offering them one drink after another, before he would let them go.

WHEN John Eade and his cousin found themselves again upon the roadway on their way back to Cartwright's bungalow, Eade acquainted his cousin of his good luck, of the business that had brought him out to the East.

"The old lady has left you a very comfortable fortune," said he. "And if you'll take the advice of an old friend, this time you'll stick to it."

Cartwright seemed to take the news more or less as a matter of course. He seemed neither elated nor surprised. He looked at Eade critically.

"You've altered a lot, John, since I saw you last," said he. "I don't think I'd have recognized you, even if I hadn't had something else to think about."

"And you've changed mighty little since the old days at college," said Eade. "You look bigger and strong perhaps, but you haven't grown out of your boyhood yet."

"Then, I don't know how I've managed it," Cartwright laughed. "I don't mind telling you I've been in hell since I came out here—stone-broke more than once, absolutely down and out, John, and I've had some strange experiences, too. But tell me more about this business. What brought Madame Scala and Liu Tang up here? I haven't yet quite got the hang of it all."

Eade again related the whole story, this time in greater detail. Cartwright listened with the utmost attention. He never interrupted, save for an occasional exclamation, until his cousin came to the part when the Chinese boy had declared that his master's razor was missing. At that Cartwright whistled.

"Then Liu Tang was inside my bungalow some time this morning," said he. "Looks as if I was lucky!"

"So far as I can make out," said Eade, "he must have got there between the time when you left and sunrise. Had you been asleep when he got here, he would have murdered you; for, according to Madame Scala, that's what he came here for. On the other hand, he couldn't have stolen the razor when it was broad daylight. He could never have got into the bungalow without being seen by one of your servants."

"That seems rational enough, John. Have you started business as a private detective? If so, you ought to be able to tell me where Liu Tang is now?"

"I don't know that," said Eade. "From what we know, it seems probable that, having got hold of your razor, he's hiding somewhere and biding his time. He's not likely to show up until after dark."

"Good Lord!" Cartwright suddenly exclaimed. "I never thought of it before! There's a scoundrel here who was out in Singan with me, who would give a lot to see me under ground. Of course, Liu Tang may not know he's here; but if that rascal happens to come across the gentleman who calls himself Mr. Eugene Pai, we'll have two of them to tackle, instead of one!"

Eade glanced at his cousin. He had got a sudden idea that was not altogether reassuring.

"What sort of a fellow is that man?" he asked.

"Man!" repeated Cartwright. "He's not a man. A Shanghai sewer rat—half of him Chinese, while not even he himself knows what the other half is. I expect he thinks Eugene sounds better than Yu Chin. In this place he's running a store where he sells cheap gin to Tamil coolies and conducts a profitable money lending business. A week's credit at twenty per cent! I warned him that if I had any trouble with him, I'd get Headley to clear him out."

"That's not the point," said Eade. "Is this the man you spoke to when we left your bungalow, the chap you told to clear out and mind his own business?"

"Sure," said Charles. "I wonder what the fellow was doing, hanging around there. He may have seen Madame Scala come in; and that's why he wanted to talk to me. John, this looks like trouble."

AS HE was speaking, Cartwright not only quickened his footsteps, but he had visibly paled. As he approached his bungalow, he broke into a run and dashed up the steps of the veranda three at a time.

"Ah Yen!" he shouted. And rather like a cuckoo out of a clock, the Chinese boy appeared from the spare bedroom.

"Ah Yen!" said Charles. "I want the truth. Has Eugene Pai been in this bungalow during my absence?"

"Yes, master," promptly answered the boy.

"What did he want?"

"Say him wantchee see you."

"And that was a damned lie," said Cartwright, "for he knew I wasn't here. How long after I had gone out did he come in?"

"No can say, master," replied Ah Yen. "When you go, I go kitchen-side to catch tiffin. Coolie there, too. Nobody in bungalow. When I come back, I find Eugene Pai standing in veranda, all same corkscrew, just like he see ghost."

"Corkscrew! Looking as if he'd seen a ghost!" echoed Cartwright. "What the dickens do you mean, Ah Yen?"

"Him standing very funny way. Body all bent sideways. Him look plenty frightened, when he seen me. Then him make bobbery, shout very loud, 'Where Mr. Cartlight, you number one size fool?'. I tell him no belong my pidgin."

Cartwright, with raised eyebrows, turned round slowly and stared at his cousin.

"Can you make head or tail of that, John?" asked he. "Because I'm blowed if I can."

John Eade shook his head.

"Nor I," said he. "You've got to remember I'm not only a stranger in this country, and from what I've seen of it, I don't mind telling you I'm darned glad I am. But I know absolutely nothing about what's been happening in this place Singan, from which, I'm told, you escaped by the skin of your teeth."

"I've no time to tell you all that now," said Charles hurriedly. "You wait here for a few minutes. If you've got a touch of fever, you want to keep out of the sun. I'm going down to the office to tell our Telegu clerk—who is one of the best men we have on the estate—that he's got to get hold of a policeman and keep Eugene Pai under close observation until he gets further orders from me. There are two men here of the Malay States Police. I'll take the responsibility. The district police officer only comes here once in a blue moon."

Cartwright was out of the bungalow before he had finished; and Eade, glad enough of a rest, flung himself into a

chair. Neither the brisk walk in the hot sun nor Headley's whisky pegs appeared to have done him any harm. On the contrary, he had broken out into a mild perspiration—evidence that he had shaken off his chill and his temperature was down.

For all that, he was as puzzled as ever. Though he had given his cousin the benefit of all the information he had, he had been told little or nothing in return. Never once had Charles mentioned Madame Scala, though he had evidenced the greatest anxiety in regard to her. The whole business was as great a mystery as ever. The only source of satisfaction Eade had was that he had found his cousin safe and well.

Eade waited for more than an hour; and as his cousin had not by then returned, and he felt well nigh starved, he told Ah Yen that he would get ahead with what there was to eat. Having made his first introduction to Malay curry, he felt an irresistible desire to go to sleep; which was natural enough in the circumstances. The boy had made the bed in the spare room. Eade took off half his clothes, and flung himself down, and almost at once was fast asleep.

HE MUST have slept for more than four hours; for when he woke up the sun was low, its rays streaming through the open bungalow windows and the atmosphere was considerably cooler.

Eade got up, explored the bungalow and found it empty. In the kitchen he discovered Ah Yen, who informed him that his master had not yet returned.

The setting sun was like a great ball of fire, hanging low above the dark trees of the jungle up the river valley, when Charles Cartwright came tearing up the steps in as great haste as he had gone out.

"Here's the devil to pay!" he cried the moment he saw his cousin. "Eugene Pai has cut off. He left the place soon after midday. It has taken me the greater part of the afternoon to find out that. He has left his store in charge of the Chinaman who helps him, and has gone downstream by himself in a canoe."

"I can't see anything particularly alarming in that," observed John Eade.

"Well," said the other, "Pai wouldn't leave all his worldly belongings in charge of a Chink, if he hadn't got something urgent to do. But that's not the worst of it. Quental got here at half past three. He managed to get the *Chauve-Souris* off the mud, and has anchored just above our jetties. I've been on board and seen him, and he gave me just about the worst news I ever want to hear."

"What's that?" asked Eade.

"Scala's on the river."

"You mean madame's husband?" Eade exclaimed.

"None other. Scala's the nearest thing to the devil in all East Indies, and that's no mean compliment, John. He has come over from Singan in a motor launch he's got, a boat he uses for river and coastal work. There 're plenty of places on the way where he could pick up petrol—Macassar, Surabaya, Batavia, Palembang and Singapore."

"He's after his wife?" suggested Eade.

"Yes. And me. And for some reason or other he has brought poor old Le Camus with him."

"Madame's father, if Quental can be trusted," said Eade.

"Quental can't be trusted, but that happens to be right. The old man's the bait with which he hopes to catch his wife. He would never have kept that woman all these years, if it hadn't been for the love she has for her father. He had the old man's money long ago; that was all he wanted. He keeps Le Camus drugged with opium, a moral and physical wreck, a man who has lost all the will power he ever possessed. My God, he has just got him like a caged bird! It's only pity for her father, and the knowledge that she can now and again do little things to help him, that has kept Madame Scala in Singan."

"She seems to have left the place on your account," said Eade significantly.

Charles glanced at his cousin quickly.

"John," said he, in a serious voice, "I take my gospel oath I've played the game—or tried to." He threw out his hands with a hopeless gesture. "How could I help being sorry for her?" he asked. "What could I do but help her all I could? And if you want the truth, John, you shall have it: It's neither my fault nor hers that we're in love."

"I guessed that," said Eade, in a quiet voice. "Bad business, Charles! These things always are."

Cartwright rounded upon him angrily.

"Don't preach to me!" he almost shouted. "I've done nothing I'm ashamed of. You'll admit that yourself, when you know the truth. You and I have got other things to discuss now, besides morality. Scala went on board the *Chauve-Souris* and saw Quental. Darned lucky for Quental he didn't kill him—he would have done, if this had been Singan. But he knows we've got police and law courts here, and he never does anything on impulse; and besides, there was a fat German on board who took a kind of bovine interest in what was going on.

"Well," Charles continued, after a pause for breath, "Scala questioned Quental; and as the little Portuguese was scared stiff at the very sight of him, for once in his life he couldn't tell a lie. Scala got the whole truth about what had happened in the night, how Liu Tang had been captured and escaped, and how madame had vanished. Quental saw Le Camus through the windows of the saloon on the launch. He said the old man looked more haggard and ill than ever, utterly broken and dejected."

"And where's the launch now?" Eade asked.

"That's just the trouble," said Cartwright. "Scala went up-stream, but no one at our offices saw him pass. Nor did Quental see him on his way up to Nolak. That means that he's turned into one of the backwaters—there 're lots of small tributaries that flow through the jungle, and that launch only draws a few feet of water. Scala's hiding somewhere, and somehow or other Eugene Pai knows it and has gone to find him."

Eade uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"You can't know that for a certainty!" he cried.

"I do," said Charles. "For the simple reason that Pai left here nearly four hours before Quental arrived; and Quental, who was on the bridge all the way up the river, is ready to swear that nobody passed him."

John Eade tried to think. Within the last few hours so many things had happened that it was as if there was something in the atmosphere that made it difficult for a man to breathe.

"If this fellow, Scala, has gone straight to some hiding place in the jungle," said he, "it looks as if the whole plan was prearranged. And the chances are," he added, "that where Scala is, there too will be Liu Tang."

"It's on the cards," said Charles. "And if so, they're waiting for something—waiting until it's dark."

CHAPTER VI

WHAT HAPPENED IN SINGAN

DINNER that night in Cartwright's bungalow was a surprisingly pleasant meal, in the circumstances. The two cousins, who had not seen each other for years, had plenty of news to exchange. Eade had entirely got over his touch of fever. He had no doubt caught a chill on board the *Chauve-Souris* in the misty river valley; but his temperature could never have been very high, and in the heat of the day he had sweated the fever out of him.

John Eade was not a man who was accustomed to finding himself in a position of considerable danger. He was one, however, who was susceptible to both atmosphere and environment; and that evening he could not but be conscious of the novelty of the situation. Though, to all intents and purposes his cousin was the same boy whom he had known years

before at college, that was the strangest meal that he had ever had in his life.

They dined on the veranda, which was illumined by three large oil-paper Chinese lanterns. Ah Yen waited at table, taking the plates and dishes from the hands of the coolie boy who brought them from the kitchen up the front steps. It was as if they were sitting in a furnished greenhouse. The trellis-work of the veranda was overgrown with creepers; the orchids in their hanging baskets suspended from the eaves of the *attap* roof resembled so many minute, fairy faces peeping curiously from out of banks of moss and fern. Ah Yen moved here and there, soft footed, his features inscrutable, though his bright eyes were wonderfully alive.

Beyond the veranda the night was dark as pitch. There was no moon. Not even the palm trees across the road were visible, though they leaned towards the bungalow and could not have been much more than ten yards away. Moreover, there were no stars. The mist from the river hung like a pall above the tree tops of the jungle.

They had already discussed their plans. Cartwright had decided that it would be useless to try to find Scala that night. They might as well look for a needle in a haystack. There were so many jungle streams up any one of which the Singan launch could have made its way, that they might explore a dozen before they struck the right one.

And so Mahomet could come to the mountain. If they remained where they were, sooner or later Liu Tang would turn up all right. The Chinese hadn't stolen Cartwright's razor for nothing; and they could do no better than be ready for him. Even as they dined, Eade had his automatic, and Cartwright a Colt revolver, both ready loaded in their coat pockets. Also, the two Sikh policemen whom the district officer had detailed for duty at the Nolak estate were on watch outside, one in the jungle at the back of the kitchen, the other on the far side of the roadway.

Eade caught something of his cousin's self-confidence. Instead of being nervous, as Eade would have expected him to be, he was more speculative than anything else. He even let fall the observation that he hoped the night wouldn't pass off without event.

"When you're worked up to concert pitch," he observed, "guess you want something better to do than twiddle your thumbs. You've got the stage set, Charles, my boy, for a very pretty tragedy or comedy—whichever it's going to be; and if this fellow doesn't turn up some time in the night, I shall feel I've got a moral right to get my money back."

JOHN EADE remembered that remark afterward.

Knowledge that Madame Scala was in safe hands and being well looked after was quite enough to put Cartwright at ease for the time being. If Liu Tang was joined by Eugene Pai, and even by Scala himself, they would find the proposition more than they bargained for. The Sikhs, who were big and strong men, were armed with rifles and, as ex-soldiers of the Indian army, first class shots. It was impossible that any one could approach the bungalow unheard by one or the other.

"I ask nothing more," said Charles, "than a reasonable excuse to put a bullet through that Chinaman. Had I not got away from Singan in the nick of time, he and Scala would have made short work of me."

"By which token," said Eade, "you may as well tell me what actually happened on the island."

Charles pushed a box of Borneo cheroots towards his cousin.

"Try one of those," said he. "You can smoke 'em all day. But you've got to keep your throat wet in this country. Headley drinks short drinks one after the other, and mixes gin with rye whisky. I don't believe in that. On the Equator, don't drink until sundown, and then stick to stingers, and put them away as fast as you like. Singan, eh? Well, it

was a sort of hell; but I'm glad I went there. I wasn't in the place a year, and yet those months have changed my life. I know that, John. Damned funny thing, the world! It was just a fluke it ever happened."

He went on to tell Eade how he had met Madame Scala by chance on the Singapore *praya*. He wasn't much of a psychologist, but it's pretty clear to every one that certain personalities blend, so to speak, whilst others clash. Madame Scala, whom he called Valèrie, had liked him from the first. And he had liked her —and that was a mild way of putting it. That was why he had gone to Singan in the first place, though he had thought he was a fool for doing so. It was like buying a pig in a poke; but the uncertainty of the whole business had rather appealed to him.

HE HAD MET Scala the next day in the Café Riche, behind the Singapore Club, and hated the man the moment he saw him. A big, broad shouldered fellow, with black eyes, curly hair and a black mustache—a kind of cross between an operatic tenor, the traditional bandit and the reigning monarch of some tinpot principality. Scala fancied himself no end; he was conceited about his physical strength, his good looks, his brains and money.

Though he was a Sicilian by birth, he had been educated in Holland. His mother was probably Dutch. Anyway, as a young man he had gone to Java, where he had had something to do with a big shipping firm in Surabaya. The company had agents in most of the Oriental ports, and Scala had spent a good many years knocking around the Indies and all the coast from Rangoon to Shanghai. At one time he had been posted in Bangkok, whence he had been sent to Saigon; and there he had fallen in with old Le Camus and his daughter.

Le Camus was a French colonial official who had come into a good deal of money. In spite of his daughter, he couldn't tear himself away from Cochin-China, because of opium. He was living a life of ease and idleness, with the opium smoker's extravagant ideas, when he fell into Scala's clutches.

Before then, Scala had discovered Singan—a little island, not more than twenty miles across, lying not far from the beaten track between Macassar and Balikh Papan in Borneo, due south of the Little Paternoster Islands, and northwest of the Spermonde Archipelago. Scala had landed there at some time or other and made friends with the sultan. He was quick enough to see possibilities in the place. The virgin jungle was thick with mature and healthy rubber trees, and only wanted clearing.

He got Le Camus to come into the business, and it was the old man's money that bought a good third of the island. The sultan had had a taste of Occidental civilization, and wanted more of it; to which end he found a banking account in Paris more than helpful. He did the grand tour, not in the approved manner of an Eastern potentate—for no one had ever heard of him—but with the sole idea of exploring all the dissolute haunts he could find between Port Said and Montmartre.

He duly returned to Singan with enlarged ideas and a lightened purse. By that time Scala's scheme was well under way. He had got a gang of Chinese coolies down from Hainan to do the clearing work; and Liu Tang had started off as foreman. In course of time the astute Chinese became a partner, for it was he who suggested the main lines upon which the business should be run.

For Scala soon found out that rubber planting wasn't as profitable as he had thought, especially as his so-called expert, Mr. Eugene Pai, let him down badly more than once. Besides, there was too much competition in the field. And then came the government restriction of output in British Malaya; and that was Scala's chance.

Liu Tang fixed it with Japanese estates in the peninsula who were ready to dodge the government and anxious to get rid of

their surplus stuff at a moderately fair price. Quental was engaged to do the running; and nobody in the world can beat the Japanese at a game like that. They got their stuff out of Perak and Johore without the authorities being any the wiser. Scala couldn't trade with the Javanese ports because of Anglo-Dutch cooperation, but he found a ready buyer in Shanghai who was willing to ship to the States.

It was a profitable business, and it might have gone on indefinitely, had Scala not been greedy. By then he had been married to Valèrie Le Camus about three or four years, just long enough to tire of her. And the very fact, too, that she was the only person in the island, except Liu Tang, who did not tremble at the very sight of him, made him furious with her. Yet in some fashion he loved her.

"And then," Charles added, lowering his voice, "the sultan saw her—and this part of the story's damnable. He used to make no end of excuses to come down to Scala's bungalow, so that he might see Valèrie. He never spoke to her. He just sat there and stared at her; and that used to frighten the life out of her, for he's a fat, oily looking brute. A pure bred Malay, all the same. That's the funny part about it. Nearly everywhere you go in this part of the world you'll find two or three distinct races living in the same place. I expect the sultan's forebear who first settled in Singan was a Malay pirate who wanted a comfortable life. The aboriginal inhabitants are more or less Dyaks. There're not many of them left; and they're no good for work.

"The sultan's palace, as he calls it, is on a hill on the north side of the island, well away from Scala's estate. He's got about half a dozen Malay wives. But Montmartre has given him somewhat advanced ideas, and he suddenly came to the conclusion that he ought to include a white woman in the collection. And Scala wanted more land. He wanted to open up a tract of country to the west, where he had found the best soil in the island. He had got to the end of old Le Camus's money, and he was putting his own away.

"In true Oriental fashion, the sultan took his time over the bargain. I've some reason to believe that weeks elapsed before he had the pluck to put the proposition into so many words. He had to be careful because, like every one else, he was afraid of Scala. He suggested that Scala should swap Valèrie for a new concession of land.

"MIND YOU, John, I didn't know that, when I got there; nor did Valèrie herself. They wanted a real planter to run the show. That was why Scala had come over to Singapore, when Valèrie found me by chance. When I got to Singan, I soon tumbled to what their game was. They had an A 1 little harbor tucked away behind a long, tree covered islet that screened the place from view of any ships that happened to pass. They had made a proper wharf, in water deep enough for the *Chauve-Souris* to berth alongside.

"Quental's boat was called the *Bat* because she used to fly by night. On the wharf was a godown, where they stored the stuff which Quental took up to Shanghai about three times a year. They turned Eugene Pai into a kind of storeman after I got there. Though I wasn't supposed to go into that godown, or have anything to do with it, I darned soon found out that there was more rubber there than we had ever tapped in Singan."

"Did Madame Scala know that?" asked Eade.

"Yes. She hated her husband, and she hated the whole business; but she couldn't leave because of her father. Quental always brought up supplies of opium from Singapore, and the whole lot of them smoked it—even Valèrie, sometimes, to try to drown her sorrows."

"She never looked that sort!" Eade exclaimed.

"Because she's no fool," Charles answered. "She never let the drug get hold of her. Nor did Scala for that

matter. As for Liu Tang, he seemed to thrive on it. The old man, and to some extent Quental, were the only two who went to pieces. I stayed there because of Valèrie. For a long time I never said anything to her, nor she to me; but we understood one another all right. She knew I was her friend.

"That's why I went about with my eyes skinned," he continued. "When I found out that I had joined a concern that was five-sixths a smuggling business, it didn't worry me much. I knew there was a good deal more than that going on behind the scenes. I had to watch four people: Scala, Eugene Pai, Liu Tang and the sultan. I had no idea what I was likely to discover, but I soon struck oil. It hadn't taken me long to size up Mr. Eugene Pai, or Quental either; and I guessed that they had both got more responsibility than was good for them. I learned that they were carrying on business in a small way on their own. They were selling stuff privately and faking the way-bills."

"But surely Scala checked his own stores?" Eade asked. "He wouldn't be such a fool as not to do that!"

"Of course he did," said Charles. "But not all the smuggled rubber that Quental brought down from the Malay States went into that godown. Quental always came into the harbor from the south, where there was a narrow strait between Singan and the islet, that rounded a coral reef at the end of what we called Seraglio Point. They gave it that name because the channel was like a miniature Bosporus; and behind Seraglio Point there was a shallow creek, running in a northwesterly direction, just like the Golden Horn. Scala knew Constantinople well, and so did Le Camus.

"Quental nearly always came in at night; and Eugene Pai with two or three Chinese—who made a good thing out of the 'squeeze'—used to wait for him on the south side of Seraglio Point with a raft. They would take off as much surplus stuff as they could carry and store it in a safe place in the jungle—a hole in the ground covered with branches and palm leaves, something like an elephant trap."

"Did you discover that by chance?" Eade asked.

"No, sir. Not by a long chalk. When you find a rat run, you may bet your last dollar it leads to a chicken coop. I struck their track in the jungle and, being a bit of a woodsman, I had no difficulty in finding their hiding-place."

"What did you do then?" asked Eade. "Did you take the story to Scala and make an enemy of Eugene Pai for life?"

"No fear," said Charles. "I didn't care two hoots whether they swindled Scala or not. I didn't even tell Valèrie about it, until months afterward—after I had discovered that her brute of a husband was thinking of selling her to the sultan."

"And how did you find that out?"

"Eavesdropping," Charles confessed. "By then Valèrie and I were beginning to understand one another. She had warned me there was danger ahead, though she didn't know anything for sure. I risked my life one night by getting inside the palace, which is nothing more or less than a fair sized bungalow, with a separate building for the harem.

"They discussed business in the most mongrel language that any two human beings ever spoke. Though I was hiding under the window and could overhear every word that was said, I could only understand half of it. It was made up of Malay, Chinese, French, pidgin English, Dutch and Pulu Petak, the southern dialect of Borneo. As I understood them all, except the two last, I managed to get hold of the drift of what they were talking about.

"The next day," he went on, "I told Valèrie about it. We met by appointment in the jungle, out by Seraglio Point. I offered, then and there, to take her away; but she wouldn't go because of her father. We thought we were alone, but we weren't! We had been shadowed by Eugene Pai. I expect he got the wind up when he had seen me going off in that direction.

"Fortunately I spotted him and caught him before he could split to Scala. I wasn't going to trust my life and Valèrie's to that man. He thought he had got me—and he had always hated the sight of me—but, by God, I bluffed him good and proper! I told him what I knew about the game he was playing with Quental, and exactly where he had hidden his stolen goods; and what's more, John, I said that I had already told Scala, and he'd better clear out while the going was good.

"You should have seen his face! He went pale green, for he knew that Scala would kill him. I hadn't any qualms of conscience about telling a lie to that man. I got rid of him all right, and that was all I wanted. He got a proa that very night and cleared out. And I never saw him again, until I turned up here, where I found that he was at his old game, cheating Tamils.

"THAT piece of bluff gave Valèrie and me a breathing space," Charles went on. "It gave us time to formulate some sort of a plan; for Scala was in no particular hurry to close the deal, if the sultan was. And before we knew where we were, Eugene got his own back. He had seen Quental in Singapore and told him I was a dangerous man. Afterward I got the whole truth out of the Portuguese. When next he came to Singan, he warned Scala that Valèrie and I knew all about his proposed dealings with the sultan. My life wasn't worth a copper-cash.

"From that moment Scala meant to do me in, and would have done it, too, if Valèrie hadn't warned me in time. Liu Tang was going to do the job; and the very fact that Scala had struck his wife, warned her that he knew. He had always treated her badly enough; for months she had watched him slowly poisoning her father with opium; he was going to sell her into the harem of a fat, native prince; but he had never hit her before. What's more, he locked her up. But her Malay servant let her out, and she came straight to me.

"We got a canoe and rowed out to the *Chauve-Souris*, which was anchored in the channel. It was pitch dark when we got on board. We found Quental half drugged with opium, but Valèrie knew how to knock some sense into his head. He was under steam already, and we told that if he didn't weigh anchor then and there, we would give him away to Scala. Whether he liked it or not, he was in the same boat as ourselves; and as I had to get out of the island without loss of time, he would have to do the same or else share my fate. That settled him all right. He knew that, if he gave me up, I'd split on him. He saw the game was ended.

"Then, there was a scene with Valèrie. I begged and implored her to come with me. But she just set her teeth and wouldn't. Her father was dying, she said, and she couldn't desert him. Naturally I wanted to stay too. I swore I couldn't leave her. But she told me it wasn't any good my staying—they would only kill me."

"There was sense enough in that," said Eade. "What happened after you had left? And how is it that they have all come here?"

"She has told me that," said Cartwright. "I had a few minutes' talk with her in Headley's bungalow. Scala never knew why Pai had disappeared; and Quental suddenly cutting off in the middle of the night made him suspicious. It took him weeks to find out the truth. When he learned it he was like a wild beast. He swore that he would be revenged not only on me, but on Quental and Pai. When he found out where I was, he at once sent Liu Tang across to Surabaya in the motor launch, with orders to catch the first steamer to Singapore and not to come back to Singan until I was a dead man.

"He taunted Valèrie with this, played with her like a cat with a mouse and told her that when he had finished with me, he would hand her over to the sultan. He had actually gone up to the palace to close the deal, when she escaped. She

got away in a flying proa, and had the good luck to be picked up by an Island ship coming up from Port Darwin. She had thought she was well ahead of Liu Tang. That's why she couldn't make out how he had got to Singapore in time to come aboard the *Chauve-Souris* as a stowaway. He must have had the luck to fall in with one of the coastal packets from Timor.

"As for the rest," he concluded, "we can only guess what happened. On discovering that his wife had escaped—obviously to warn me—Scala must have boarded the motor launch as soon as it came back from Java. He probably had to wait three or four days, while the Malay in charge went on the bust in Surabaya. When he got to Singapore, he probably found out from the harbor master that the *Chauve-Souris* had come up to Nolak. And as he knew I was here, he guessed his wife was on board."

"And what's happened now?" Eade asked. "What do you think the game is?"

"I know no more than you," said the other. "The only thing we're certain about is that Scala's not far from here, and we'll hear from him sooner or later."

"Supposing he attacks Headley's bungalow?" suggested Eade. "If Eugene Pai is with him he will have been told his wife is there."

"Headley's all right," said Cartwright. "I've warned him, and he has armed all his Malay servants. I offered him the two policemen, but he said he didn't want them. He's got about fifteen men under arms; and when it's dark as this, the one weapon I personally shouldn't like to run up against is the Malay *kris*."

Eade nodded in satisfaction, and hurled the butt end of his cheroot over the veranda, the sparks flying in the road like a kind of firework.

"There's one aspect of this business I can't make head or tail of," he observed. "Scala wants Eugene Pai's blood almost as much as yours. Pai didn't strike me as being a man with any more pluck than a cockroach. Besides, he's got a guilty conscience. One would have thought that he would rather run a hundred miles than find himself face to face with either Liu Tang or Scala. And yet you tell me that he has deliberately gone down the river, presumably to meet Scala by appointment!"

Charles Cartwright shrugged his shoulders as he got to his feet.

"I haven't the remotest idea," said he, yawning and stretching his arms. "You may depend upon this, however: Before many hours are passed we'll learn the truth—or some of it."

CHAPTER VII

THE JUNGLE PATH

EADE didn't feel in the least disposed to go to bed; he had slept for quite a long time that afternoon, and his cousin's story had given him food for reflection. Stretching himself on one of the long chairs on the veranda, he lit another cheroot.

As for Charles, he went to the head of the steps and stood there a moment, gazing into the black night in the direction of Headley's bungalow. Suddenly he turned and spoke to Eade.

"I'm going round the outpost line," said he. "These Sikhs can be trusted, but it's as well to see they're doing their job."

He went down the steps, and Eade could hear his footsteps on the gravel as he crossed the road. Suddenly a low, breathless voice, with something of a snarl in it, the words clipped short in the broken English of every native of India from Kashmir to Colombo.

"Who goes there?"

Muffled voices. And then silence again. Two minutes afterward, the same challenge from the back of the house, from the jungle behind the kitchen.

A little after, Cartwright reappeared at the head of the steps. He was so tall that his head almost touched the eaves.

"Well," said his cousin, "they're on the

qui vive all right. The fellow opposite was on you like a knife."

"Yes," said Charles casually. "I've sent them both away."

Eade sat up in his chair.

"Whatever for?" he asked.

"Because we can look after ourselves, John. Those two men have gone up to Headley's, whether he wants them or not. You and I are going to bed right now."

"I don't exactly feel inclined to go to sleep yet," said the other. "I'm as wide awake as a tomtit. I feel as if I had eyes all round my head."

"I don't want you to go to sleep," said Cartwright. "You would be a fool if you did. You needn't even take off your clothes. All the lights are going out in the bungalow anyway. You've got to lie down on your bed, my son, and have your revolver ready under your pillow. I ask for nothing better than for Liu Tang to come here looking for trouble. He'll get it."

Eade rose from his chair.

"Give me another of those whisky pegs, as you call them," said he, "and I'll obey orders. If that's all you want, Charles, I'm game. Another drink and I'm sure ready for any one. I seem to have picked up the customs of this darned country mighty quick. You keep your soda nicely iced, by the way."

"And another wouldn't do me any harm either," said Charles, helping himself to a good three fingers' worth. "Here's to the night!" he cried, raising his glass. "I've had some exciting experiences since I came out here; but I've got a hunch that the next six or seven hours are going to produce something extra special."

"This morning," said Eade, "I was a sick man, dead tired and all nerves. I wouldn't have been much use to you. But now, why, I'm just glad of the chance to see this thing through, though I warn you I'm not a particularly good shot."

"I'll give you an electric torch," said the other. "There's a spare one. And after midnight the moon comes up—a full moon, too. If nothing happens before then, it'll be almost as light as day."

ONE AFTER the other he blew out the Chinese lanterns on the veranda, and then put out the lights in the sitting room beyond.

Eade had the spare room from which the steps led down to the bathroom. That no intruder might enter by this way, the door of the bathroom that connected with the garden was locked from the inner side, and the trapdoor at the top of the steps was lowered. In consequence Eade felt tolerably safe. Any one who proposed to attack them must cross both the veranda and the front room, before he could enter either bedroom.

Nonetheless John Eade's sense of security diminished somewhat the moment the bedroom lights were out, and he found himself straining his ears, listening to sounds imaginary and real. There was not a breath of air. The stillness was broken only occasionally by faint and indefinite noises in the jungle. A gigantic moth brushed with velvet wings past his face, so suddenly that it frightened him.

He certainly had no inclination to fall asleep. He lay there trying to imagine what kind of man this Scala was, trying to picture the island of Singan. He had read about places like that in Conrad's books, but it had never occurred to him before that that sort of thing could be real.

In a way, he was sorry for Charles. He couldn't blame his cousin for having fallen in love with Madame Scala. He actually smiled when he remembered the *Chauve-Souris*.

He felt that the whole of this place—or rather, the little he had seen of it—had confounded his capacity to associate ideas. Little, painted, powdered women hadn't, as a rule, got the reputation for being courageous. She didn't look strong either; and yet, how many of her sex would have been able to travel all those miles through the jungle? And in pajamas! Ye gods, what a land!

For more than an hour John Eade's

thoughts kept him company, kept him from getting cold feet. And then, by degrees, the uncanniness of the whole affair began to tell on his nerves. Waiting there in the darkness, unable to move—lest the camp bed on which he lay should creak—he found it necessary to remind himself that he was a New York business man who believed in a comfortable life, who traveled first class and stayed in the best hotels. He had now a sense of being imprisoned in the midst of an impenetrable, tangled wilderness. He imagined, at the back of the silence, soft footed, prowling beasts. There might have been no other living soul within a hundred miles of him.

And then Charles, in the next room, began to snore—or to produce a very good imitation of the real thing. That saved Eade from becoming morbid. Had he not been determined to play his part as well as he could, he would have thanked Charles audibly, for the connecting door between the two rooms was wide open.

Cartwright kept up his nasal serenade for the best part of half an hour; and then, apparently getting tired of it, he confined himself to regular and heavy breathing—so lifelike a reproduction of the real thing that Eade began to fear that he really might be asleep.

Once or twice Eade was tempted to speak, but his *amour propre* prevented him from doing that. Time and again he assured himself that Charles wouldn't be such a fool. And yet, the doubt persisted.

SUDDENLY he sat bolt upright, conscious of the feeling that suggests the hair of one's head standing on end. He had heard noises before, inexplicable noises—rats, perhaps, reptiles or bats. But he could not mistake the quick, soft pattering of feet that were either bare or lightly shod.

As quietly as he could, he swung himself round into a sitting position, until his feet touched the floor. At the same time, with his right hand, he whipped out his automatic from under his pillow. In his left hand he held his torch.

He was startled by the sound of his cousin's voice, quite close to his ear.

"Wait for me!" Charles whispered.

The bright beam of Cartwright's torch suddenly stabbed into the darkness like the blade of a simitar—a dazzling, divergent ray that terminated in a golden disc, framing the white face of Madame Scala.

She stood perfectly motionless. She had the staring eyes of a blind person, as indeed, for the moment, she was blinded by the glare. She could see nothing, until Charles switched off his torch and lit the candle at the bedside. She looked first at Charles, then at Eade, and then smiled when she saw their firearms.

"You are safe at any rate," she said. "I was told that you were dead."

"Valèrie!" Charles exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here?"

She was wearing a dress of Shantung silk that belonged to Mrs. Headley—who was a little woman, too. She had evidently thrown it on in a hurry, for she was without stockings, and her black shingled hair was ruffled.

"I've got much to tell you," she said. "I thank God that you are alive. And you too, Mr. Eade," she added. "I was assured that Charles had already been murdered with his own razor."

"Whoever told you lied, you see," said Cartwright. "All the same there's a glimmer of truth in it, because my razor has been stolen, and you couldn't have known that."

"No," she said, and stood thinking a moment. "My husband is not often wrong," she added.

"Your husband!" cried Charles. "Has Scala seen you here?"

"It was he who sent the message," she answered. "I will tell you. I was asleep, sound asleep, when I was awakened by a voice at my window. The veranda, as you know, runs round three sides of the bungalow; and I was in the end room on this side. The man at the window told me not to be frightened. I thought I recognized his voice the moment I heard it.

When I lit a candle I saw his face. It was Eugene Pai."

"Pai! How did he get there?"

"Quite easily," said Madame Scala. "There are men watching the house, and Mr. Headley himself is awake. Pai told the Malay *syces* that he wanted to see Mr. Headley and the men let him pass. I suppose he found out from one of the Chinese servants which room I was in."

"Did Headley see him?" asked Cartwright.

"No. He came straight to me, along the veranda. The message he gave me was terrible—so terrible that it could have come only from my husband. He said that my husband was not far away, waiting for me, that I must go to him at once. He swore that you were dead, that your throat had been cut in your own bungalow and, if I didn't believe it, I could go there and see for myself."

"And where's Pai now?" Cartwright demanded. He looked rather like a dog straining at a leash.

"Half way down the road," she answered, "between the Headley's bungalow and here. He wouldn't come any farther. He was too frightened of Liu Tang. He thought Liu Tang was in this bungalow, and might kill him."

"Was that all the message?"

"No. It is all terrible! Eugene Pai brought me my husband's orders. I am to go at once to the place where the launch is hidden. If I do not return with Pai immediately, my father will be murdered."

Cartwright uttered an oath under his breath, and then turned to Eade.

"You see the type of man we've got to deal with," said he.

"So far the game's in our favor," Eade answered. "The opposition program's not according to schedule. You're supposed to be dead, my boy. Remember that."

UPON a sudden Cartwright flung a hand upward and snapped a finger and thumb, as if he were throwing something over his right shoulder. Next he blew out the light.

"You're right, John!" he exclaimed. "We can spring a surprise on Scala. You don't mind talking it out in the dark?" he asked.

"It's better," said Madame Scala quietly. "Eugene Pai is not far away."

"Headley knows you've left his bungalow?" Cartwright asked.

"I suppose so," she answered, "though no one may have seen me leave."

"It'll be best to warn him," said Charles, "for if he finds out you're gone he may be anxious. We go past his bungalow anyhow."

"Where are we going?" asked Eade.

"Speak in a whisper," said Charles. "I've got an idea. We want to find out where Scala is. Eugene Pai shall show us the way. Valèrie has got pluck enough to do anything. I'm going to send her back to Pai with the news that I'm dead as mutton. She'll act the part all right."

"That will not be so difficult," she said. "I am already frightened. I fear for my father."

"We'll save him, Valèrie," said Charles. "I swear it. If we look in at Headley's on the way, he'll want to come with us. And he'll be a good man for the job; he's the best tiger shot in this country, one of the few fellows I've ever heard of who will sit down in a clearing and eat his lunch while the beaters drive a tiger up to him. Unless Liu Tang is with him, Scala has got no one who would stand up to a Java sparrow. We'll be three to one, and if we can't get the old man away we're not worth much."

"And what about Pai?" asked Eade. "I guess that fellow won't give much trouble, but we've got to account for him somehow."

"Dead easy," Charles replied, "if Valèrie does what I want. If Pai came through the jungle he must have brought a lantern with him."

"That is so," said madame. "He had a lantern in his hand, but it was not alight."

"He's bound to light it when he gets into the jungle; otherwise he won't be able to see his hand in front of his face. That

lantern is going to be our Star of Bethlehem, John, though we've got to keep at a safe distance, or Pai may hear us. I'm going to leave the most important part of the business to you, Valèrie. If you find out from Pai that we're on a path that leads straight to the launch, or if you suddenly catch sight of the lights of the launch ahead, halt—to give us time to get up to you. Say you're tired or too frightened. I'll back Headley and myself to catch that scoundrel alive, stop his mouth and tie him up to a tree."

"And then," asked Madame Scala, anxiously, "you save my father? Battista means what he says. My father is no use to him now. You will have to be quick."

Cartwright answered her tenderly. It was so dark that they could not see one another; but John Eade suspected that Charles had taken her hand.

"Trust to me," said he. "God knows how this night's work is going to end. But whatever happens, I won't fail you, Valèrie. I'd rather die."

"I understand," she said in a very quiet voice. "I will do what you wish. It is the only thing—our only chance."

AT THAT she left them without another word. They heard her run lightly and swiftly down the steps of the bungalow. On the veranda they stood listening, and presently could hear voices a little distance down the road. Cartwright grasped his cousin by an arm.

"Come along," said he. "Valèrie won't hurry. She'll give us all the time we want, but we've got to get a rope and something that will do for a gag at Headley's."

They went down the steps, and at the bottom walked on the stiff, short grass, the peculiar wild grass of the Malay Peninsula that stands upright like the bristles of a wire brush. Pai and Madame Scala were on the gravel roadway, for they could hear their footsteps a little way ahead of them.

It was so dark that it was difficult to discern even the outline of the tall palm trees. Nothing else but the shape of these could have told Cartwright when he had reached Headley's bungalow, for the gate, lying in a bay of shrubs, was invisible.

"Wait here, John," said he. "I'll be back in less than no time. We've got to let Headley know; and besides, we want him. If Liu Tang's with Scala, we'll have our work cut out."

"What about madame?" Eade asked. "She and Pai will be out of earshot in two seconds. Supposing we don't find them again?"

"Little chance of that," said the other. "About three hundred yards farther on this road ends at nothing. He'll have to go into the jungle, and he can't do that without lighting up. Besides, I don't propose to be away for long."

INDEED, he was back again before Eade had had time to feel anxious, and with him was Headley, who announced that he had a loaded revolver, a six foot length of rope and a thirst that he wouldn't swop for a hundred dollars.

Cartwright had already explained the situation to his manager. And the three of them set off in Indian file, Cartwright leading, Headley next, but they had not gone far before Charles came to a halt.

"We had best wait here," said he. "I know where we are. There's the pine-apple plantation on this side of us where the ground drops down toward the river. If we wait, sooner or later, we're bound to see a light.

"And ten to one I know the jungle path he means to take," Headley whispered. "Last week I shot the biggest pig there I've ever seen in my life. I've got his tusks at home. The old fellow looked as if he could have ripped up an elephant."

"We're after something a damned sight more dangerous than a wild boar now," said Cartwright.

"If what I've heard's true," said the other, "the man's something worse than a scoundrel. By God, to think of selling his wife to a Malay!"

"You wouldn't be surprised at that if you knew him," said Charles. "Scala's

an extraordinary man. Vain as a peacock, cruel as a cat, clever as a monkey. I don't mind telling you that I was frightened of him. There's no way of getting at the brute. He's always so cocksure of himself."

"He won't be—after tonight," said Headley. "By gad, look!" he exclaimed. "There's Pai!"

Sure enough, there was the glimmer of a light some way below them on the hillside, evidently on the outskirts of a strip of jungle that lay between the pineapple plantation and the river. Cartwright still leading, they followed a cultivated furrow between two straight lines of the low growing, slender leaved plants.

Though they were now in the open, it was as much as Eade could do to make out the stumpy figure of Headley, who walked in front of him. The light from Pai's lantern was more or less stationary, though it swung backward and forward, until suddenly it vanished, to appear again a moment after.

At once Headley cut off in a beeline toward the spot.

"Come on!" he cried. "Follow me. I can find the place in the dark."

A FEW MINUTES afterward they were in the jungle, Headley still in front. As Eade couldn't see an inch in front of him, he was given the end of the rope; and holding this, he followed his two companions something after the manner of a blind man led by his dog.

They had not gone far before the light of the lantern again came into view, considerably nearer than when they had seen it before. Indeed, so close were they now to the man whom they were tracking that John Eade was convinced that they must be heard, since time and again one or the other stumbled, and dry twigs were continually breaking under foot.

For this reason they slowed down and proceeded with greater caution. They found it safer to go forward with long, slow strides—a gait more resembling the stealthy advance of some nocturnal beast of prey than the walk of a human being.

To Eade the path seemed endless, a narrow tunnel through a labyrinth. Sometimes their feet squelched in sticky mud; while at other times they walked on moss as soft and deep as eiderdown.

Half an hour of it, and John Eade was wet with perspiration which dripped from the back of the hand that clenched the grip of his pistol. The other hand was sore from holding the rope; and his eyes ached and smarted from staring into the darkness.

At last the light in front of them stopped. Cartwright in a whisper told his cousin to be careful. Still in single file, they moved forward on tiptoe, feeling the ground like cats.

The sound of voices came to their ears. They heard Madame Scala's voice distinctly, and the very words she used. There could be no doubt that she was playing her part to perfection.

"I go no farther!" she cried. "I dare not!" And then she groaned. "Oh, take me back!" she said. "This is more than I dare do."

Little, fat Headley was life and soul in the business. Before Charles could stop him, he had gone down upon all fours and had crawled off into the jungle undergrowth.

"Wait a bit," Cartwright whispered. "Headley means to cut him off. And he'll do it, too."

He allowed his manager the best part of a minute; and then, by giving a jerk to the rope, he intimated that he wanted Eade to follow.

Eugene Pai was talking, protesting vehemently and even using threats, when Cartwright caught him by the throat. A hand was clapped upon the man's mouth before he could cry out, and at that very moment Headley took him from behind.

They tied a scarf tightly around Eugene Pai's mouth; and then, with his hands bound behind his back, they lashed him to the trunk of a tree.

"That's a makeshift gag," Headley whispered in the man's ear, "but it'll serve its purpose. You can't escape; and

I warn you, it will be more than your life's worth to make any attempt to give the alarm. I'll settle with you afterward, my friend. You're not going to get off scot free for this night's job, or I don't know the difference between Plymouth gin and lime juice."

From the first, Pai had made no attempt to struggle. The lantern had fallen from his hand, the light had gone out and they were in utter darkness. Madame Scala grasped Eade by an arm.

"Battista!" she whispered. "See! He is there! Those lights are on the launch."

At that moment Headley gave a grunt of satisfaction upon having disposed of their prisoner. When Cartwright asked Headley whether they should relight the lantern, Eade quickly interposed.

"Better not," said he. "The launch is only just ahead of us."

WITHOUT a word being spoken they advanced in single file, Cartwright again leading. Presently they were able to see the dense foliage on either side of the path and the rope-like creepers suspended in festoons from the branches of the trees. It was then that they discovered that Madame Scala had forced her way to the front.

Headley took her by the shoulders and held her back forcibly, yet almost playfully.

"This is no place for a woman," said he in an undertone.

"My father!" she pleaded breathlessly.

"I daresay," said he. "But you can do nothing. The fun may begin at any moment, and if there's shooting we'll want a clear field of fire."

Reluctantly she dropped back and allowed both Headley and Eade to pass. Cartwright was now some few yards ahead. They could see his stooping figure silhouetted against the lights on the launch; and when he went down upon all fours, they followed his example, to come up on either side of him when he halted behind the trunk of a great *tapang* tree that had fallen across the path.

In this they were in luck's way; for the tree trunk was not ten yards from the bank on the stream, which was but a few feet wide—only just wide enough, in fact, to accommodate the motor launch.

Amidships was a covered in saloon in which no full grown man could have stood upright, with three large portholes on either side of it, all of which were open. The light within emanated from two electric lamps; and so blinding was the brightness that neither Cartwright nor his companions could see anything for more than a minute.

While they waited, they were able to hear distinctly the voices of the two men in the saloon, the one high pitched and querulous, the other deep and quiet.

By degrees John Eade became conscious of the details of his surroundings. He was first aware that there was a strip of water, no more than a few inches in width, between the side of the launch and the bank of the creek. In the bows of the boat were two or three men whose figures, being in the shade, were more or less indefinite, though from the squatting attitudes they had assumed they were evidently natives of some sort.

In the saloon the heads of the two occupants were visible, the one front face, the other with his back to the porthole. The first was the emaciated, wrinkled countenance of an old man who had almost snow white hair that stood upright on his forehead, a short untidy beard, white eyebrows and a mustache. His eyes were deep sunken with black rings round them—watery eyes with minute irises. His complexion was a most unhealthy parchment color; and his shoulders, round and stooping.

As for the other man, little of him could be seen but a pair of enormous square shoulders and very unusual black, curly hair that grew as thick as a kind mane over the nape of his neck. He was evidently sitting upon a seat immediately underneath one of the portholes.

It was he who laughed. Such laughter John Eade had never heard in his life before. It was laughter that suggested

the panting of a hunting lion. There was neither mirth in it, nor satisfaction. It suggested nothing but brute, physical strength.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TURN OF THE SCALES

FOR THE MOMENT there appeared to be no way of getting on board the launch without being seen. They lay there listening, not five yards away from the very man they wanted, able to hear every word that was said.

The conversation they overheard was carried on in English and French alternately. In moments of extreme tension old Le Camus lapsed into his mother tongue, though for the most part Scala spoke in English. And it was he who did most of the talking.

"Have you ever known me not mean what I say?" they heard him ask. "But, my friend," he went on, in a voice meant to be conciliatory, "do not distress yourself. She will come back to me all right. She may be here at any moment."

"And then?" the old man asked.

They could see his face, scared, agonized, like that of a man in torture.

"And then?" said Scala. "To Singan, where once and for all I have done with both of you."

He rapped out these words with a kind of vicious glee; and they saw him throw back his black curly head, as if he laughed again.

"Yes," he went on. "I've had enough of you. Valèrie has done her best to fool me. But I am neither blind nor a fool."

Le Camus was staring at him, his features immobile, his whole face like wax, his lips parted. For a moment he never moved.

"*Diable!*" he exclaimed, and then in English. "You are not human."

"I am too clever to be that, perhaps," said Scala. "You are nothing to me but an incumbrance. I shall be glad enough to get rid of you. Valèrie knows that, and therefore she will come back."

"What will you do with her in Singan?" Le Camus asked.

"She shall have time to repent," said Scala. "For the rest of her life she can find what consolation she can in a Malay harem, and such sympathy as she can get from the daughters of Malay fisherfolk and Hainanese coolies."

The old man must have flung himself upon his knees, for his face suddenly disappeared, and they could see nothing but his thin clasped hands. He spoke volubly, excitedly, and in such rapid French that of those who were listening only Madame Scala could understand a word.

During these brief moments she experienced the most terrible anxiety, the most fearful suspense. She was powerless to help. She saw in torment—as she had often seen before—the old, broken man who was her father. She knew the violence of her husband's temperament and his unscrupulousness. And yet all this time she had the strength of mind and the courage not to cry out and disclose the fact that she and her companions were there.

She had crawled to Cartwright's side. When the old man flung himself upon his knees, the young planter extended a hand and grasped one of hers in a mute attempt to strengthen her fortitude.

Presently Le Camus rose to his feet, and they could see the tear drops streaming down his hollow cheeks, to hang like like shining drewrops in his white unkempt beard.

Sheer physical exhaustion had at last silenced the old man. He stood there trembling, panting. Scala made a clucking noise with his tongue against the roof of his mouth, much as one does to a naughty child, suggesting regret more than disapproval.

"Pray calm yourself," said he. "I can well understand that for you these minutes must seem unconscionably long. It is but natural that you should be overanxious. Permit me to recommend your usual solace—the opium pipe."

He appeared to lean forward to take

something from the table in front of him. The old man hesitated a moment, and then cried out in French.

"Never! Never again. The good God will give me strength!"

He must have flung the opium pipe through one of the portholes, for they heard something strike the trunk of a tree in the jungle at their backs. And then again Scala laughed softly.

"How often have I heard you say that," he sighed. "My old friend, your good resolutions grow monotonous. Spare me the trouble of listening to such cant. For once I have advised you for your own good. If you are to be a sane man when Valèrie arrives, I suggest you calm your nerves."

LE CAMUS mastered himself with difficulty. They could see his face; he was moving his lips, chewing the ends of his mustache. Scala had spoken in English; and, as if he found he could better control himself when he used a language with which he was not thoroughly familiar, the old man answered in English, too.

"And if she does not come?" he asked.

"You die," said Scala quietly.

"For myself," sighed Le Camus, "that would be—release, escape from hell."

Scala repeated:

"If she is not here by daybreak you die. But, as I have said, my friend, you have no great cause to fear. For Valèrie will come."

He said this in such confidence, with such silken deliberation, in a voice so soft and yet so venomous, that the three men who were listening took in a deep breath and tightly gripped their weapons.

They could still see Le Camus. His face was like that of a corpse, more waxen, more still than ever.

Scala must have been looking the other way, so sure of himself, so despising his impotent and miserable victim that he neglected for the moment the most ordinary precautions.

For they saw Le Camus's face undergo a rapid transformation. His numbed, frozen features suddenly became alive. With staring eyes and parted lips, his expression was that of a fiend.

They saw him move forward quickly—a spasmodic jerk of the body as if he snatched something from the table. Realizing what was going to happen, those who were hiding in the jungle could remain in idleness no longer. Madame Scala gave vent to a half suppressed shriek. Cartwright sprang to his feet. Headley appeared in the light streaming from one of the portholes of the launch. with the bright barrel of his nickel plated revolver gleaming in his hand.

At that moment a deafening report came to their ears. A revolver shot in the confined space of the little saloon, breaking like a thunderbolt upon the silence of the jungle. Though they sprang on board almost simultaneously, John Eade was the first to enter the saloon, where he beheld Battista Scala dead.

The man of Signan lay sprawled upon the narrow red plush seat that ran the length of one side of the saloon under the portholes. His attitude was as unnatural as his appearance was terrible; for one elbow was pulled in under him, and that shoulder was several inches higher than the other, while the other arm hung down to the floor.

His legs were stretched out underneath the table. He wore no collar and no tie. His great muscular neck was like that of a wild beast. It was clean through the base of the throat that old Le Camus had shot him, the bullet having smashed through the cervical vertebrae of the spine. Death had been instantaneous.

John Eade had never seen the man alive; but Scala looked formidable even in death. There was a certain massiveness about the lower part of his face that, in spite of his good looks, gave him an ape-like appearance. His lips were drawn back, showing almost perfect teeth under the black mustache. Upon the hand that was visible there was a ring on nearly every finger, including one in which was set an enormous emerald; and these

feminine ornaments looked strange, indeed, upon one who had the limbs of a Hercules.

As Eade turned his attention to the old man, his companions entered the saloon. Though he still held the smoking revolver in his hand, Le Camus did not yet seem to realize what he had done. He stood motionless, astonished, as if unable to believe. He never looked away from Scala until his daughter flung her arms around his neck. And by then Headley had taken the matter in hand.

"This can be hushed up," said he. "I'll wire for Richardson, the district officer, to come here at once. He'll not make a case of it. We've evidence enough that this scoundrel has met with no more than his deserts."

OLD LE CAMUS, who had begun to tremble violently all over, was conveyed by Charles Cartwright and his daughter to one of the little cabins aft. Here madame remained with him, while her husband's body was wrapped up in a blanket and laid out on the saloon settee. By then Cartwright had gone ashore with Eade and had brought on board Eugene Pai, still bound.

Headley decided to return to Nolak by way of the river instead of the jungle, as he considered neither Madame Scala nor her father in a fit condition to walk, and they could certainly not be left on board the launch. They had some difficulty in finding their way in the darkness out of the narrow backwater, but by the time they reached the main river the full moon was up, and a few minutes afterward they anchored off the Nolak jetties alongside the *Chauve-Souris*.

Quental was hailed and told to take charge of the three Malays who were on the launch. But Headley was determined to find a safer asylum for Eugene Pai than the paddle-boat and a more trustworthy jailer than Ferñao Quental who was known to have been the prisoner's confederate in certain shady transactions.

Two rickshaw coolies were routed out of their hovels at the foot of the hill on which was the Tamil compound; and these were ordered to take Le Camus and his daughter straight back to Headley's, with a note to Mrs. Headley, telling her that all was well.

In the meantime the Telegu clerk was got out of bed, and Eugene Pai was locked up in one of the inner offices until such time as he could be questioned on the morrow. It was about two o'clock in the morning when Headley suggested that they should all turn in.

There is nothing remarkable about the fact that all three should have entirely forgotten the very existence of Liu Tang. During the last hour or so they had had quite enough to occupy their minds; and besides, the after effect of acute tension is as often as not a kind of mental negligence. On the assumption that enough had happened that night to last a lifetime they were inclined to believe that the whole business was ended.

But it so happened that Liu Tang, though long since incapable of wreaking Scala's vengeance on his enemies, had prepared for them unconsciously something in the nature of a sinister surprise—the kind of gruesome, practical joke that might have afforded the astute, cold blooded Chinese no little satisfaction.

THE THREE MEN were walking abreast on the roadway and were discussing every aspect of the strange events of the night, when they came to Cartwright's bungalow. They stopped at the foot of the veranda steps to say good night to Headley, and John Eade had actually climbed half way up the stairs, when he let out an oath and sprang down to the bottom.

"My God!" he exclaimed, pointing upward to the right of the house. "Look there!"

A half naked, rigid body was suspended between earth and sky, between heaven and hell—a yellow corpse that looked to be floating in the moonlight in mid-air.

Like some great Oriental gargoyle, the

upper part of the man's body protruded, stiff and horrid, from the side of the bungalow from under the eaves of the *attap* roof, at the point where the canvas ceiling of the front room ended at the veranda.

That he was dead there could be no doubt, for the moonlight was full upon his pale, gleaming body. Though the greater part of his arms were visible, these appeared to be pinned to his sides in the sharp angle formed by the beam that supported the roof and the outer rafter that continued over the veranda. His head had fallen downward and was turned a little to the right, which made it appear as if he was endeavoring to look round the corner into the veranda itself.

Cartwright was the first to find his voice.

"What do you make of that?" he asked. "It's Liu Tang all right."

"And he's dead," said Headley. "There's only one way to answer that question, Charles, and that's to get him down."

They had some difficulty in doing this, and it was a job none too pleasant. John Eade, standing upon the top rail that inclosed the veranda, was able to push the body away from him, until it was no longer wedged in the acute angle formed by the rafter and the beam. Cartwright in the meantime had climbed out of the little window at the end of the sitting-room; and standing upon the sill of this, he was able to grasp the body with one hand and jerk it clear of the *attap* roof. It came away with several dried *nipa* leaves of which the thatch was composed, as well as with a portion of the canvas ceiling that must have been rotten with damp. It fell with a dull thud upon the close cut grass of the little lawn. Headley had pretty thoroughly examined the body with the help of his electric torch by the time that his two companions joined him; and he had found in one of Liu Tang's clenched fists Charles Cartwright's razor.

"No signs of violence here," he remarked. "There's *rigor mortis* and he's stone cold. He must have been dead some time. By gad, Charles," he suddenly exclaimed, "you haven't got a wildcat in your bungalow by any chance, have you?"

"No," said Cartwright. "There's one next door though. Beverley says it keeps him awake half the night tearing up and down the canvas ceiling after the rats and lizards."

"Yes," said Headley thoughtfully. "That's just it, Beverley's rats have all migrated to you. And you've got a worse lodger up there in that roof than a wildcat. A snake, and a venomous one, too."

Cartwright whistled.

"You're right," said he. "That's what got him. But when did this happen?"

"Must have been in the earlier part of the night," said Eade. "You remember Pai told Madame Scala that she would find you with your throat cut?"

"Do you mean he was in the roof all the time?"

"Sure," said Eade. "Your boy, Ah Yen, told us that he found Pai standing on the veranda with his body all twisted round, looking as if he'd seen a ghost. Well, I guess he went up there after you'd gone, to see what he could find out, and he got the shock of his life. Liu Tang saw him and spoke to him. Somewhere at the back of the veranda there must be a gap between the roof and the wall."

"There is," said Charles. "I see what you mean. Pai got his orders from Liu Tang, who sent him down the river to Scala. Directly he found Madame Scala on board the *Chauve-Souris*, of course, Liu Tang must have guessed that Scala himself wouldn't be far behind."

"That's about it," said Eade. "And the fellow lay up here determined to do his job properly with your own razor before he joined Scala. He played his cards uncommonly well, too; for if madame had found us both with our throats cut, there's very little doubt that by now she would be well on her way back to Singan. You'll remember we went out of the bungalow in a pretty great hurry, and we naturally never looked back."

"He wasn't there when we went to bed," said Charles, "before I put out the lights. I'd swear to that."

"No," said Eade. "It was when we were waiting for him, pretending to be asleep—and I don't mind confessing I was just about as nervous as I've ever been in my life—that that snake got him, and made a better and a quicker job of it, Charles, than you and I would have done."

THE FOLLOWING DAY, the evidence given by Mr. Eugene Pai bore out the truth of Eade's conclusions. Pai declared that at about midday the day before he had been out on the bungalow road. He had seen Madame Scala break from the jungle, exchange a few words with a Chinese coolie on the pineapple plantation and then make straight for Cartwright's bungalow.

He had thought he had recognized her, though he could scarcely credit his eyes. A European lady, so scantily attired, who staggered as if she had reached the last stage of physical exhaustion, was an object quite sufficient in itself to arouse his curiosity.

He had followed her to the bungalow, where he had waited outside until Cartwright himself returned. By then, he had made quite sure that it really was the lady he had known in Singan. He had heard Cartwright say that he was going to take her to Headley's; and when the coast was clear he had gone into the bungalow to try to find out what he could from Ah Yen.

He had been startled by a voice that he recognized at once. When he was on the veranda, he had seen Liu Tang's face up above him, at the point where the *attap* roof crossed the outer wall. And Liu Tang had told him exactly what he had to do: He was to take a canoe and go downstream, and sooner or later he was bound to come across Scala, to whom he was to give the news that Liu Tang had been too late that morning to do the job that had brought him to Nolak. But the thing would be done all right that night. It was of the utmost importance that he, Eugene Pai, should tell Scala that madame had been placed in the charge of the wife of the manager of the estate.

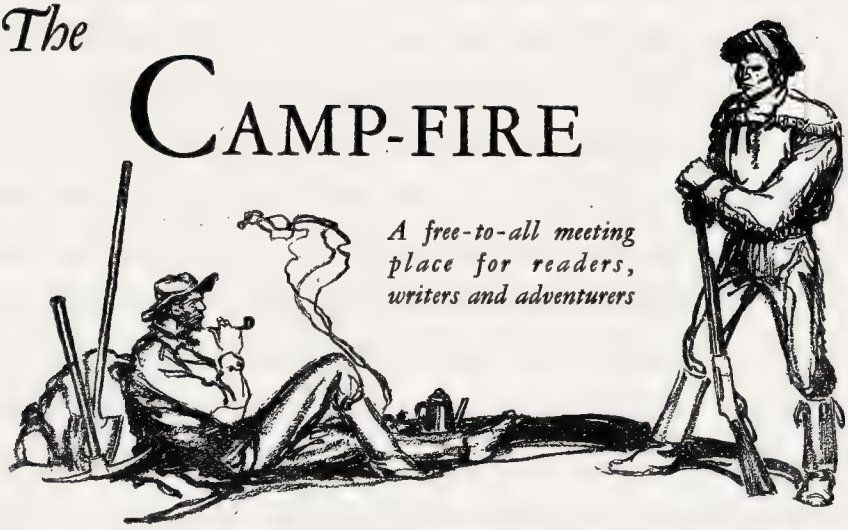
When he had heard the evidence, Headley looked across at Eade and laughed.

"Looks as if we've got to thank that snake for a lot," said he. "At the same time, Charles, you'll have to pull out that canvas ceiling to get rid of the brute. A wildcat's preferable." And by way of explaining the matter to Eade, he added. "In this part of the world, sir, you've got to have one or the other. It's a choice between two evils. That's how we live out here."

"Seems to me," said John Eade, "that on occassions there're more than two evils to choose from."

"Maybe you're right," Headley laughed, and then shouted for stingers.

The CAMP-FIRE



A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Detail

IT HONESTLY warms my heart, and makes me feel that *Adventure* is doing a truly great work in the world, to see the way in which scores—on a bad break, thousands—of readers come right up with no hesitation, and criticize any mistake in our pages. Though there are times on any magazine when silly misrepresentations get through, I think that this sort of thing happens less often on *Adventure* than—on what name you?

Down here in the office we're as careful as we can be. Any questionable story is read and re-read until it is well nigh worn through. All authorities at our command are consulted on doubtful points. Then, if still there remains an argument, the *Ask Adventure* experts are called in—always with the author's permission.

In this way we feel that our fiction is kept clean of cheap, careless errors, at any rate—but even then, there come some slips. Here is a small one—important enough, however. One of our most popular and experienced of authors is criticized, and admits the mistake.

In the March 15th issue, in a story "Lost Legions," Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson tells of American and British sailors having black braid on their collars. This he states because they are supposed to be in mourning for Lord Nelson!

How come? On every blouse I wore in the American Navy all I had was white tape. If it ever got black—well we certainly did not hear about it. Furthermore I heard it was that the neckerchief we wore for mourning. Maybe I'm wrong. Let's hear from somebody that has some real facts on this. Too bad that slip came early in the story; it left a flat taste in what otherwise was an interesting tale.

Tell Mr. Pendexter to stick to his short stories, they can't be beat, but his serials, not so good. Give us more of Tuttle, Bedford-Jones, Nason, Raine. They are all good.

And how about a long modern story on some big city? Don't tell me there is no adventure there.

Sorry to have to butt in with a criticism. But wishing you well, I am, Sincerely yours—CHARLES REECHIA, 1636 Lexington Avenue, New York City.

Dear Mr. Reechia:

The editor of *Adventure* has forwarded me your letter containing the "How come?" concerning my having ascribed black braid instead of white, to the American sailors' uniforms in my story, "Lost Legions."

I must admit having stubbed my toe and landed heavily on my left ear, on this detail. What makes it worse is the fact that I really know better, although my knowledge of the Navy is rather limited, being confined to those rare meetings when Army and Navy would get together for a good old fashioned party. The resulting celebration was generally such that all details became strangely blurred! I remember meeting the gang from the Helena one glorious Fourth of July in Hong-Kong. Sometime I am going back to Hong-Kong and see what it really looks like . . .

I believe it to be a fact however, that the Amer-

ican sailor actually does wear a symbol of mourning for Lord Nelson. As you suggest, it is probably the black neckerchief, which was copied no doubt from the British naval uniform. There still sticks in my mind some legend to the effect that there is a story behind the braid worn on the American sailors' collar. Perhaps some one who really knows the facts can give *Adventure* the correct dope on the mourning for Lord Nelson, and whether it is the neckerchief or braid or both.

Thanking you for your interest in the matter and trusting that between us we can find someone who can give us the correct dope, I am, Yours very sincerely—MAJOR MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON.

Their Day In Court

NOT TO CRAMP the style of Captain Guthrie, whose interesting letter follows, may I say that I grin just a trifle at his use of the word "spotless"? Doubtless the captain knows his ground far better than I; but I spent a couple of summer seasons between the Skeena River and the Aphoon Mouth of the Yukon.

May I add that olfactory memory once made me reject unconditionally a darned good story by one of our best known *Adventure* authors, because he allowed his chief character, a Dartmouth College graduate, to fall instantly in love with a Tagish Indian maid?

Perhaps I was influenced just a trifle, too, by the fact that I myself obtained a sheepskin at that particular New England college. At any rate, I understand the story was purchased—without a qualm—by an editor friend of mine who tilted through Terence at a Mid-Western university . . .

Almost everybody in the States has a misconception of "Siwash," a name generally and vulgarly applied to the Alaskan Indian. In two years residence in Alaska as Officer in Charge of the Second Section of the Washington-Alaska Military Cable & Telegraph System, headquarters in Seward, I have learned considerable about this people and respect them far more than I thought I ever could, when I came up here.

The term "Siwash" is given as a designation (generic) to cover the Thlingits, Aleuts, Eskimos and all the native peoples along the Yukon and in other parts of the Interior. The natives themselves hate it fiercely and to not like even to be called "Indians," preferring "natives" if you have to mention them as a class by themselves. I have found great numbers of them intelligent, loyal, conscientious and even artistic. In Alaska they are known either to be slovenly housekeepers and unspeakable cooks, or just the reverse. A native housekeeper and cook who has had proper opportunity to learn, is a household martinet and is widely appreciated as a kitchen adornment. Some of the Interior roadhouses are operated by fullbloods and are notable for their wonderful meals and spotless cleanliness.

As mothers, the native women are sometimes truly wonderful. A tribe near Ruby has had a custom ages old, of trading babies. Their babies are taken away from the mothers at birth, by neighbor women, and raised on a mixture of mountain sheep suet and a local weed that produces some chemical action which reduces the nourishment of the suet to the value of mothers' milk. The children thrive on it so well and the system has been so beneficial to the health of the young mothers that nobody in that tribe ever raises her own children at all! In some Eskimo tribes children are worshipped in about the same way the Chinese worship their ancestors.

Chief Alexander who lives near Tonsina says the white man has broken down a civilization which was superior to that he introduced. The so-called Siwash of today wears good clothes, studies the fur markets by radio, and votes. They are not always uncomely. Some of the women are snappy dressers, the young girls invariably dressing as well as the average shop girls in the States, the clotheslines in a native village indicating that they wear finery from the skin out. Morally, the Siwash if given proper training, is not different from other peoples of immediate primitive origin; and intellectually they are only a grade lower than the tribes in the States.

One thing I have noticed that interests me very much is that they have little real chivalry toward women and apparently no family affection. Children sent to Mission School lose contact with each other, as brother and sister, and only refer to their parents when questioned about them, and very indifferently, at that.—RALPH R. GUTHRIE, Captain, Signal Corps, U. S. A., Seward, Alaska.

A Sunken Galleon

ANY COMRADE want to go on an exciting treasure hunt with George Allan England—whose serial novel of the sea begins in this present issue of *Adventure*? For myself I find it hard to imagine a finer vacation than one on which sun, sea, give-and-take comradeship combine with a strong possibility of profit! Particularly when the other party to the handclasp would be a chap nervy enough to cavort about the Caribbean on a tramp gasoline freighter . . .

But read G. A. E's letter.

We are here at last after some very stirring experiences by sea and land. Came from Grand Cayman, itself full of obeah, wreck and mystery, on a freighter loaded with gasoline, which was worse than an open barrel of gunpowder. Were over a week on that death-trap. The slightest spark would have blown us all to atoms. It was sure some ticklish experience, living in a heavy reek of gas, and I admit I was scared. Mighty glad to get foot on "terra cotta" again. I see a big story in this—a maniac on a gasoline steamer, running amuck with a torch. Have positively all the dope on this sort of conveyance; far more than I enjoyed getting. The captain told me the exact location of a Spanish galleon on a reef not far from Cayman. He wants to go after several "chists" of gold in three fathoms of water, with me. I'll give you the whole story when I get back to N. Y. He's a hardheaded old Caymanian, and no phantom-chaser; positively affirms the stuff is there, and that if we could get a schooner and a diver we could salvage it. Seems to me as if there ought to be some man with a bit of cash and time, who would cooperate. The cap'n and I have the time but not the cash. We could give the backer the thrill of his life and a 25% share of the loot. Maybe you can help me locate the right man. This sounds like a wild-goose scheme, but judging by the character of the cap'n, I have entire confidence in it, the more so as some friends of his have already taken a good bunch of coin from the same reef. One month's supplies would be needed, as rough weather might hold up the game. We should have to wait for a calm day or two before diving. Think it all over, and prepare for the full story when I arrive.

I am now full of obeah, voodoo, treasure, Spanish sunburn, sharks, palms, coconuts and bananas, but no oil of same. In a few days, leave for the Virgin Islands, then back here and to New York. With best personal wishes, I am as ever, Most cordially yours—ENGLAND.

If any reader desires to inquire further concerning this project, it would be wise to address Mr. England at Bradford, New Hampshire.

Once Aboard Your Lugger—

AND THE DELIGHT of far horizons is yours! "The gal"—well, we've always found her there, too. (Note: For *once* we employ the editorial "we"!). So shall you find her, probably in every port—or even back of beyond.

It's the toughest thing I have to face—this having to tell *other* comrades about a thousand and one trips *I'd* like to make! One of these times—in Camp-Fire—I'm going to put in a bid for a certain chap I know. He is six feet two, weighs one-ninety, *was* a fair boxer, a poor-to-fair shot, a good enough swimmer for thirty-five, and able to cook desert or mountain chuck. But he has never been to sea—except on liners, and on two-masted fishing schooners.

I won't reveal his name. But if after you read these letters which follow, if you still are interested at all—

Since I was a kid I've been watching the silhouettes of men from the far places, pass before your Camp-Fire. I've brushed sleeves at times with some of these "silhouettes" at Slave Lake, Matamoras, Burk-Burnett, Miami, or on a little Belgian boat or a liner. I chatted with one on a broken wall at Soissons: stripped souvenirs from another's plane at Fismes; picked up another's broken sword in the Avoncourt Woods.

Once in a while it occurs to me that I ought to throw a chip or two on the Camp-Fire flames. I have a chip—a little brass plate—that is good fuel. It carries a name that electrified the world one hot day in July a few years ago. But it will tell its own story; and I'm almost convinced that I should offer it for the walls when *Adventure* opens its igloo as a meeting place for glorious vagabonds.

Also, I'm going after more fuel for the fire. We're going out in a windjammer when my partner gets back. He's gone down to see if the equator is still in its proper place.

Our boat is not quite sixty-five feet long and is shoal draft, so we ought to be able to go lots of places.

And now comes the problem. We are going purely for pleasure, and we have from now on to make the cruise or cruises.

We have been asking many questions. And still we haven't decided just all we want to do. We plan to cruise the South American and African coasts. We'll have a movie camera, motorcycles and small speed boat. We'll have short and long wave length radio.

Now we want advice. Perhaps we won't take it when we get it; but I'm asking for it. What would you do, Mr. *Adventure*, if you wanted pleasure and excitement and still do something which would count?

I'm garrulous, I know, but you're such a friendly human and such a good listener.

Our idea is to keep to the "back of beyond," visiting cities only occasionally.

Haven't you some pet "far place" which you would like to visit by proxy? Or some animal whose existence you'd like verified?

Perhaps you ought to know our joint equipment in knowledge. My partner is pretty smart; so we know French, Spanish, German, English—photography and painting—antiques—animals—geology—geography—marine science— Well, we'll have a large encyclopaedia along, anyway, to look things up.

Suggest things. Thank you very much.—DONALD MACKAY, U. S. Naval Hospital, C-3, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dear Mr. MacKay:

Adventure has delegated three of us to answer your fine letter about suggesting something to look for on your contemplated cruise. To me falls the South American portion, or certain parts of that vast continent.

Your idea brings back to me an idea I had, years ago. I had conceived making the overland trip down through Central America from Mexico to see how the work on the Panama Canal was progressing. The C. A. country was then, I believe, much wilder than it is now. There were fewer railroads and highways than there are now—and they do not have them in abundance at this very time, especially of the north and south variety. They most all run east and west, what few there are.

Well, I hit out. I made fair time through Mexico down as far as the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and asked the general manager of the Pan-American Railroad for a pass down to the Guatemalan border. He was a Mr. Wise from Texas. He insisted on giving me a return pass, saying the trip I was going on was impossible and I couldn't even get through from the end of the line to Guatemala City. I took the return pass and used it as a passport when I got locked up in a thatched fort on the border. The officers could not read and I told them it was a new sort of *passporte*, and they let me go. I was an awful wreck when I finally hit the Canal Zone. I had forded and swum dozens of rivers, some of them literally crawling with alligators and dotted with swimming sharks. I worked a while for the Government and then hit South America. I made some long walks in that country and I fear me I will never recover from the effects of a few of them.

Now I can sit right here and visualize the entire S. A. coast all the way around from Panama back to Colon. I ought to be able to do that, for not only have I seen the coast for long stretches where I hiked, but I have answered literally thousands of questions about it in past years. I can also visualize the entire topography of the S. A. continent in one hunk and in small portions. I can take a pencil and jab at a map and say "there" and "there" and "there" you will find something. It's a danged big continent.

There are not over a hundred real Indians left down there. There are just a few stops on the coast where something might be seen on the Pacific side. These are (I am omitting the big ports): Salaverry and go out to the Chan Chan ruins and make enquiry about the general digging that has been done in the past and try to spot the place where the Little Fish was dug out. The Big Fish was never found. The little one ran to about $8,000,000. Also, for my part, I would like to know if the Peruvian Government will allow treasure and curios to be carried out. I have heard a rumor that they have shut down on the permits. The old aqueduct and the modern sugar mill that's using it and the general dope on the realm of old Chimu the Great should give material for a magazine article or a newspaper supplement.

There is another similar but different ruin near Lima, known as Pachacamac. These are not Inca ruins. They are contemporaneous with the Incas and were subjugated by them. (I don't know whether you can follow me or not, I'm getting all spread out.) Pachacamac is fairly well known to archaeologists. I'm thinking about the Big Fish when I mention the Chan Chan ruins at Trujillo a short distance by rail from Salaverry. Up in the highlands of Peru are the pre-Incan Cyclopean ruins and the Incan ruins in various places. These are pretty well known. The same people put up those big stones there that put them up on Easter Island. Just who they were no man can ever surmise. Along down the top of the Andes we have a number of volcanoes and high peaks all the way from Ecuador to Chile. The Quechua Indians (subjects of the Incan kings) have been domesticated for longer than we have.

In southern Patagonia the nomad Indians used to make their long circle up and back to the Straits during a year. I don't imagine many of them are left now. There is a Welsh colony on the Atlantic side of the Chubut River. There isn't much to see all the way up to B. A. That's a big city with all that the word implies. Same all the way up to Rio. The things to see are back inland. There is the big southern pine forest in Brazil, the coffee ranches, big cattle also in the south, and back behind that an unknown country to the Andes. From Rio all the way north there are rivers that might be interesting to travel up. Then the Amazon is a 2,500-mile trip to Iquitos. Any of the river trips up from Iquitos put you into wild country. But you are in a lugger and won't be up there, possibly. Up around the shoulder of S. A. you veer west around the Guianas. Some gold up-country in all three and some diamonds in British Guiana. There is undoubtedly a connection somewhere between the diamond fields of Brazil and this one. Trouble to follow it is the heavy jungle. Back around Venezuela you might make a trip or two inland to see the llano country. The "poets" of the plains do the herding. Then along the Colombian coast. At Honey Shark Point you hit the San Blas coast. They are much tamer than they used to be and you can stop in their villages if you get back on your boat before dark.

The only thing I ever heard of being found in South America that excited undue comment was when I was in Panama. A sailor claimed he found a prehistoric horse and killed it with a club. A quarter of a million dollars was spent by an expedition to go to the spot—and failed to find it. It might have been a sailor's yarn at that!—EDGAR YOUNG.

—you might scribble a note to "Mr. X." It will reach its destination if sent in care of— —ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Alaska

THE Copper River region offers excellent prospects for good fishing and big game hunting.

Request:—"About June 1, 1928, my brother and I intend to go to Alaska for about a two year stay for an outing. We would like to go inland about fifty miles to a place where we could enjoy hunting and fishing. Will you please furnish us with information as to the best part of Alaska for this purpose, also as to equipment required for a trip of that duration; also about what the cost of the trip would be for clothing, arms and food supplies."

—GEO. CARTER, San Quentin, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Theodore S. Solomons:—There are so many, many places fifty miles or so from the coast where you would have ideal conditions that I hesitate to select any. Also the great Yukon Valley is pretty attractive, with mighty good hunting and fishing. You might say most anywhere.

The big hunting region most people know about is the Alaskan Peninsula, Kodiak Island and Kenai Peninsula, and also around Prince William Sound and the Copper River. You get plenty of big game around there and big bear especially. But you'd have to employ a guide some of those places and you probably don't want to be bothered. It would cost you a great deal more to go into the Yukon, not only in transportation up there but in groceries and such afterwards.

Chicle

FROM the bush of far off Guatemala comes the principle of one of our favorite vices.

Request:—"Will you tell me about chicle? How is it obtained? Are the natives of Central America the ones that made it into a commercial product?"

—ROSE CHEW, Los Gatos, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—Chicle, also called balta, the crude basis of chewing gum, is obtained from the forests of Peten District, in Guatemala. Balta is the dried juice or gum of the bullet or bully-tree, used for insulating wires, etc.

It is the gum chicle of the bully-tree juice that is used in chewing gum manufacture, and also as a substitute for gutta-percha.

The chicle is put up in bales weighing from 100 to 150 lbs. each, making a bundle about the size of the cakes of artificial ice as sold in the cities of the United States.

The milk of the chico-sapote or sapodilla tree,

from which chewing-gum is made, runs only during the rainy season, from June to January, inclusive, during which time the "chicle bleeders" are living in the bush.

The camps are located near *aguadas* (water-holes), and sometimes are quite permanent camps. The houses are palm-leaf thatched on roofs, with sides made of boughs, but they are thoroughly water-proof. At the end of this season of hard work the chicle bleeders return to their homes for three or four months to spend in a fortnight all they have so laboriously earned during the seven or eight months, and then they live on credit until the beginning of the next season.

Needle Gun

"COULD cure an Indian of wanderlust at the distance of half a mile."

Request:—"Do you remember the needle gun—fifty caliber center fire with a flip-up extractor that threw the empty shell into the next county every time? They were popularly supposed to be an adaptation of the muzzle loading Springfield rifle of Civil War days. They were issued to the settlers in Central Nebraska in the Seventies as an antidote for Indian raids, and they worked fine. I knew an old scout who claimed he could cure an Indian of wanderlust at the distance of half a mile. Some range 50 years ago!

I want one of those guns, 100 loaded shells and a reloading outfit, primers, etc. You will confer a great favor on me if you will give me the address of a company that can furnish this outfit."

—F. L. BUKER, Petersburg, Alaska.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I well recall the old "needle gun" or .50-70-450 Springfield. In fact, I have two of them, one being given me by the grandson of the man who used it in the Indian Wars in the Seventies.

They were good rifles, and very sure in killing power; I even have two of the rare .58 rimfire, the first variation from the muzzle loaders. And I knew the men in the Antelope County, Nebraska, sandhills to whom similar rifles were issued by the Government, as you mention.

Now, as regards getting one of the rifles:

Rifle at $3.50, or carbine at $4.50, cartridges at $2.50 per hundred, primers at 90 cents per thousand, are to be hand from the following firm:

Messrs. Bannerman's Sons, 501 Broadway, New York, N. Y. The rifles are good used ones.

For reloading outfit, the following sell one at $7.00 complete.

The Lyman Gunsight Corp., Ideal Tool Dept., Middlefield, Ct.

With this outfit, and a few pounds of black powder and some lead, you should have a rifle that would give you many hours' pleasure, as much in reloading cartridges as in actually shooting them, and that will kill game as dead as it ever did. I've fired my old rifles, and while they smoke up the scenery a bit, still they certainly do something when that bullet arrives.

RECENTLY a New Jersey reader wrote Lieutenant Townsend of the Army Matters section of "Ask Adventure" for information concerning an Army camp for his son. The letter with the address of the writer was destroyed before it could be answered. If this comes to the attention of this reader he is requested to send his address to Lieutenant Townsend in order that his question may be answered.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 841 Lake St., Oak Park, Illinois.

Yachting BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash., or HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

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Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 429 Wilson Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

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Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.*

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign LIEUT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 231 Eleventh St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps LIEUT. F. W. HOPKINS, Marine Corps Fleet Reserve, Box 1042, Medford, Oregon.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

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American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

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Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles and amphibians; their customs, habits and distribution.*—DR. G. K. NOBLE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.*—DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J.

Ichthology GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology *(a) Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology. (b) Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies). (c) Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

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Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, Port Angeles, Washington.

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The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, 2121 New York Ave., N. W., Washington, D. C.

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Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 5316 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz.

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